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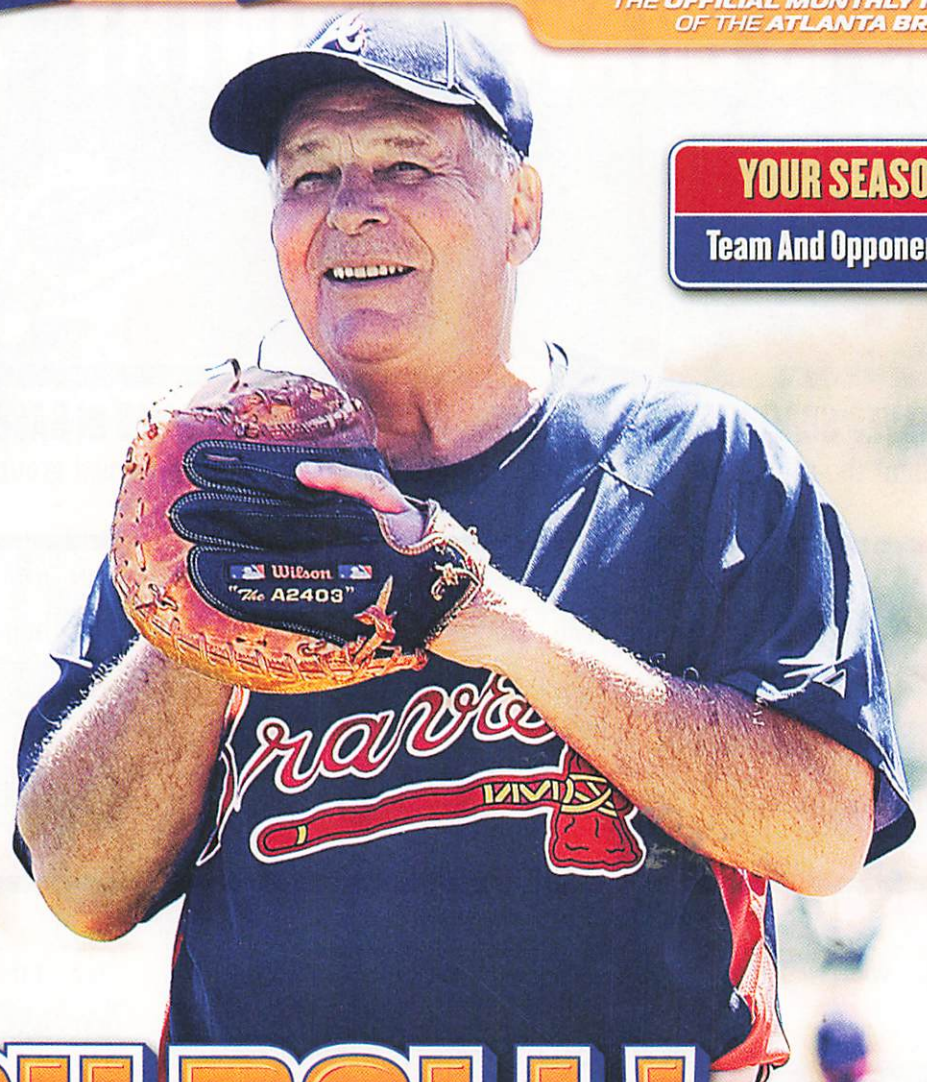
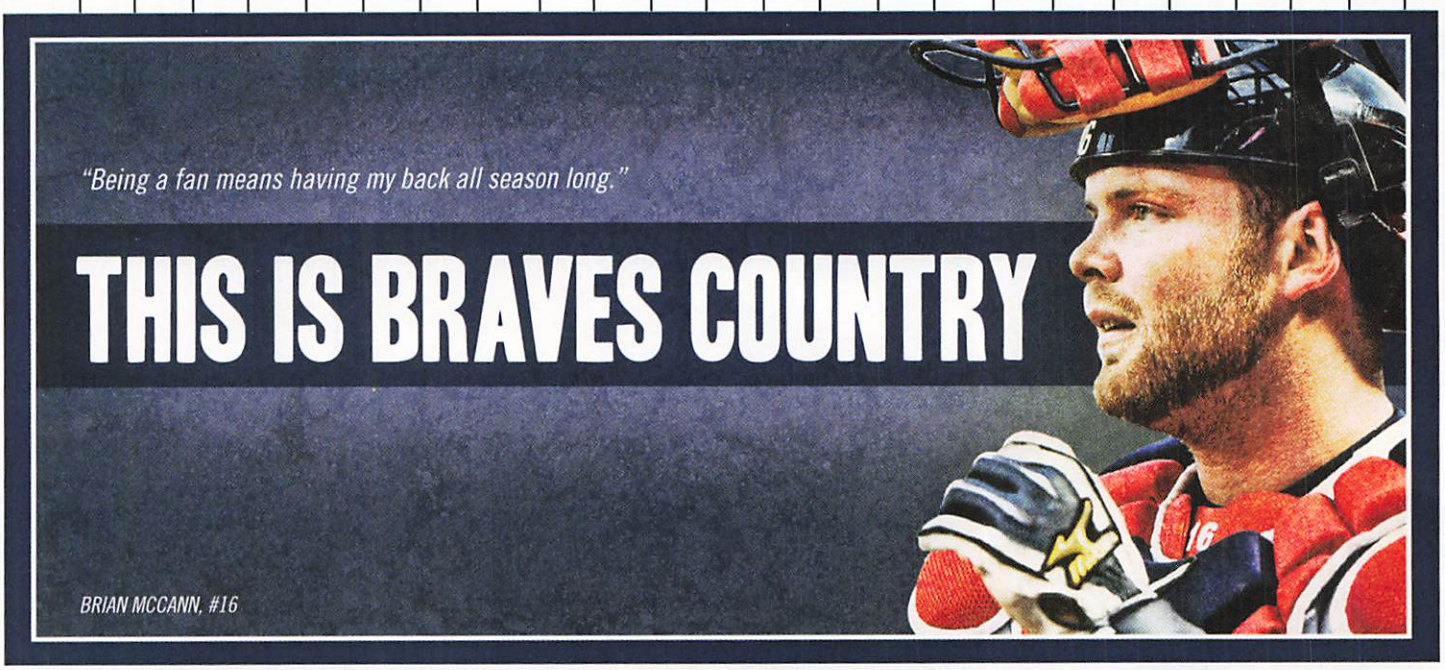


It's One For All And All For One In Bobby Cox's Last Go-Round

PLAY BALL!

BODIES OF ART

A Look At The Tattoos That Are Quite The Rage In The Clubhouse



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BATTING ORDER

APRIL 2010

POWER HITTERS

6-10
BODIES OF ART
Permanent Ink Is Quite The Rage In The Clubhouse, Where Roughly Half The Players Wear Tattoos By Patty Rasmussen

20-21
PLAYING PEPPER
Nate McLouth Answers Our Questions About His Vision, His Number And A New Season Interview By Patty Rasmussen

22-25
PLAYOFFS OR BUST!
Off-Season Additions Plus Last Year's Second-Half Run Provide Confidence That The Four-Year Drought Is Over By Gary Caruso

26-29
THE GREAT CHASE
Can Anyone Head Off Phillies' Quest To Be First To Win Three Straight NL Pennants In 66 Years? By Ken Rosenthal

36-37
FOCUSED
THIRD IN A SERIES: It's One For All - And All For One - In Bobby Cox's Last Go-Round By Patty Rasmussen

38
STORIES OF BOBBY
Jim Leyland: It Was Apparent As Far Back As '82 That Cox Was One Of The Best Managers By Patty Rasmussen

40-41
STAYING CONNECTED
Numerous Options Still Allow Fans Across The Country To Follow Every Pitch By Jon Ross

43
VALUABLE ADDITION
Melky Cabrera Brings Numerous Skills And A Championship Pedigree To The Outfield By Mark Bowman of MLB.com

44-45
COMING ATTRACTIONS
Award Winners Heyward And Kimbrel Highlight 400 Fan Club's Annual Banquet By Jon Cooper

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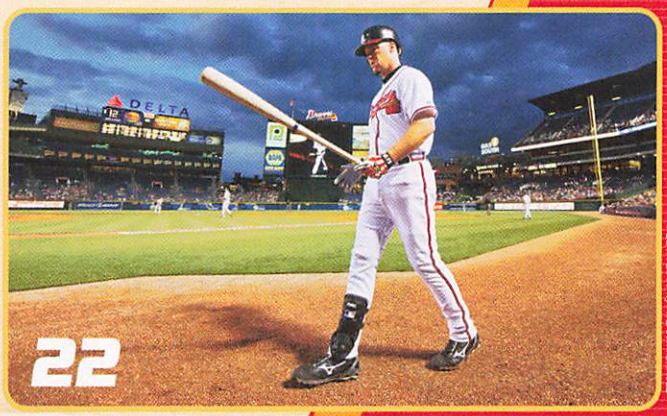

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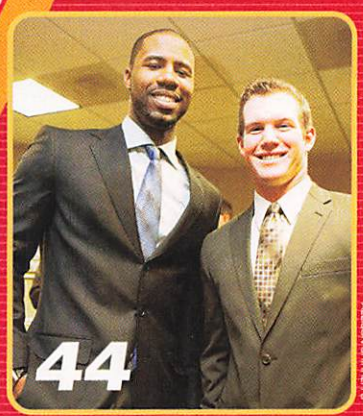
ALLISON SHIRREFFS



ALLISON SHIRREFFS

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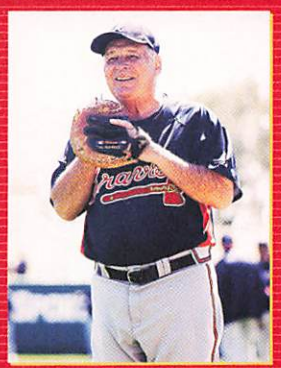

BATTING ORDER

APRIL 2010

SINGLES HITTERS

14-15 SCOREBOARD
16-17 BUNTS & BASEHITS
18-19 OFF THE FIELD
31 BEHIND THE NUMBERS By Steve Fall
32-33 BIG SHOT POSTER
Two-Sided Weapon Chipper Jones
54-55 HEROES & HISTORY
Key Member Of '82 Division Title Club, Bob Walk Now A Veteran Pirates Broadcaster
By Brian Knapp
56 ALUMNI NOTES
58-59 BEYOND BASEBALL By Patty Rasmussen
60-61 TALKIN' CHOP
62 XTRA INNINGS
The Final Resting Place of "Miracle Man"
By Patty Rasmussen

PITCHERS

11 PAINTING THE CORNERS By Jay Busbee
12-13 A WIFE'S PITCH By Carolyn Lowe
17 FRANK WREN
19 BOBBY COX
25 BATTER UP! By Takashi Saito
57 GARY CARUSO
61 JOHNNY SAJEM'S CARTOON

GARTH VAUGHAN

PINCH-HITTERS

49 RADIO NETWORK
50-51 TURNER FIELD/TICKET INFO
52-53 2010 SCHEDULE CALENDAR/TV LISTINGS
55 THE SCIENCE OF BASEBALL By Steve Fall
56 BIRTHDAYS

58

ON DECK

46-48 FARM SYSTEM ROUNDUP By Bill Ballew
47 DOWN ON THE FARM By Mike Minor

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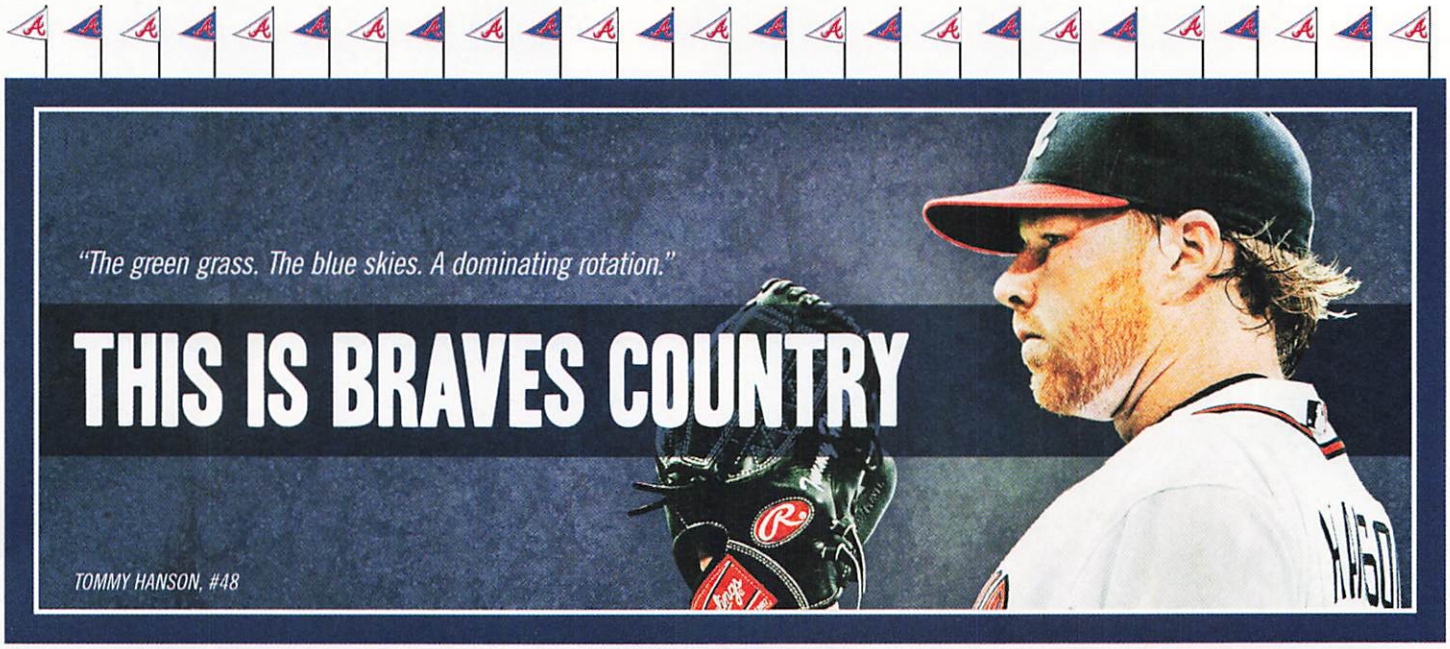

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(L-R) Jordan Schafer, Peter Moylan and Kris Medlen proudly display their arms of ink.

By Patty Rasmussen

BODIES OF ART

Permanent Ink Is Quite The Rage In The Clubhouse, Where Roughly Half the Players Wear Tattoos Of Various Designs

It was early last season, and Peter Moylan was doing what he always does during batting practice - standing in the outfield shagging flyballs. Little did the reliever realize that the wiry, heavily tattooed fan yelling at him was actually a world-famous tattoo artist that desperately wanted to give his arms a makeover! Not a pitching makeover, mind you, but rather just the appearance of Moylan's arms.

Brandon Bond, the owner of All Or Nothing Tattoo And Arts Studio, located in the Atlanta suburb of Smyrna, is also a die-hard Braves fan and season ticket holder. He was in the outfield bleachers when his professional eye caught sight of Moylan's famous "sleeves," tattoos that run the length of the arm from shoulder to wrist.

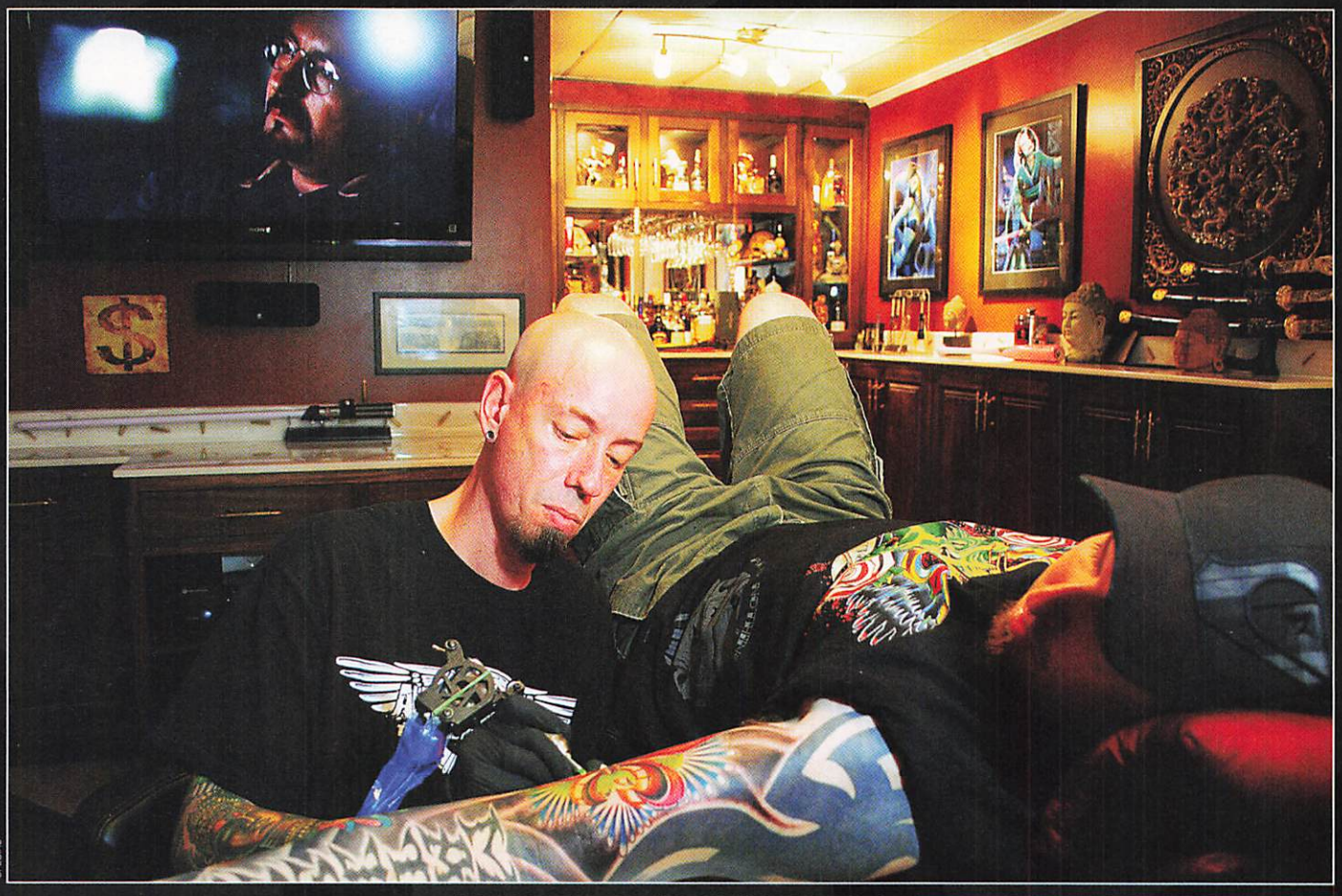
"They were bad," said Bond, "And by bad, I mean awful. I yelled to him, 'Dude, I can fix those for you!'"

Moylan looked back at the "heckler," and tossed a baseball that Bond promptly gave to a kid nearby. Eventually, the two men began talking to each other, and by the following day, a promotion package from All Or Nothing Tattoo was sitting in Moylan's locker in the Braves' clubhouse.

Since that meeting, Bond has tattooed not just Moylan, but also has enhanced and added significant ink to Kris Medlen, Jordan Schafer and Martin Prado. In less than a year, Bond's reputation has spread like wildfire through major league clubhouses.

"I'm tattooing guys from 13 different teams," he said. "The ironic thing is that my wife and I bought the season tickets so I could get away from work, but it's turned out to bring me even more work!"

ALLISON SHREFFS



SPECIAL

ALLISON SHIRREFFS

Artist Brandon Bond, a Braves fan and season ticket holder, works on Peter Moylan (above) to produce the finished work (below) that Moylan displayed at spring training.

Bond's not complaining. A 20-year veteran of the business, he loves tattooing and enjoys the creative freedom that players give him, whether it's enhancing a tattoo or adding new elements.

Certainly, tattoos (marks made by inserting indelible ink into the layers of skin) aren't for everyone, either because of religious or cultural prohibition, or simply for personal taste.

New relief pitcher Takashi Saito said that in Japan many health clubs, saunas, and spas ban customers who have tattoos because the art is associated with the Japanese mafia. Nevertheless, in the U.S. and many other parts of the world, tattooing is perceived as a means of expression and has become more prevalent and mainstream in the past 10 to 20 years.

"I think a lot of people started noticing tattoos on musical artists or athletes, so it was out there," said Bond. "Also, the quality of the art has gotten much, much better."

In the Braves' clubhouse alone, easily half the players have tattoos. Some are elaborate, such as Eric Hinske's full-back tattoo with half-sleeves and chest pieces done in the Japanese Yakuza style. At Hinske's request, this story does not contain elaboration about, or a photo of, his work.

Chipper Jones sported a Taurus astrological symbol on his left bicep for the past 10 years and added a right bicep tattoo this past off-season of a deer head silhouette and the word "Hood," his wife Sharon's nickname.

New lefty relief pitcher Mike Dunn has a tattoo of a cross and a baseball on his upper back between his shoulder blades. Married players have been known to wear "ring" tattoos on their ring finger since they generally remove their wedding rings when they play.

But the tattoos created by Bond, a trained artist, are in a different league altogether. Bond's work could easily adorn a wall, either as a mural or on a canvas, but tattooing is the medium that captured his talent, and for that, Moylan is grateful.

"I am quite tatted," said Moylan.

In addition to his "sleeves," Moylan also has the Southern Cross constellation, part of the Australian flag, tattooed on his upper

back.

"My first tattoo was an eight-ball on my upper left bicep, pretty silly, I know," he said.

From there, Moylan added large swaths of dark "tribal" designs, which covered the eight-ball. He also added his daughter's names, Montana and Matisse, on the inside portion of his forearms.

"Tattooing is addictive," he said. "You rarely see a guy with just one tattoo."

Moylan's early tattoos were impressive to the uninitiated, but Bond saw them as a non-cohesive mess.

"He basically had two full sleeves of patchy tattoos done by a bunch of different artists," said Bond.

Moylan went to see him in July 2009 during the All-Star break for his left arm "touchup." He wouldn't have his pitching arm tattooed during the season. With little "blank space" to work with, Bond set about creating a theme that tied the artwork together, adding new elements, like flowers and shading. He also added color and sharpened edges of existing tattoos. One of the larger and most beautiful new features is a colorful fleur-de-lis on the underside of Moylan's left bicep.

"Pete's girlfriend, Mandy, is from New Orleans, so that's a nice tribute to her," said Bond.

Moylan had three re-do sessions, each lasting between 10 to 13 hours.

"While you're there, you think, 'I'll never do this again,'" said Moylan with a laugh. "But once you're healed up, you're already thinking about what you're going to do next."

For that sort of time commitment, Bond makes sure his celebrity clients are well taken care of in his beautifully appointed personal studio at All Or Nothing Tattoo. The studio has a private entrance and looks more like a living room than what comes to mind from the words "tattoo studio." It features warm-colored walls and soothing, recessed lighting, a wet bar, comfortable sofas, and several flat screen televisions.

When Medlen made his first pilgrimage to All Or Nothing during last year's All-Star break, he whiled away the hours in the tattoo chair watching an entire season of the Sopranos on DVD.

Medlen's arms were significantly tatted "half sleeves," from shoulder to elbow, when he visited Bond's studio.

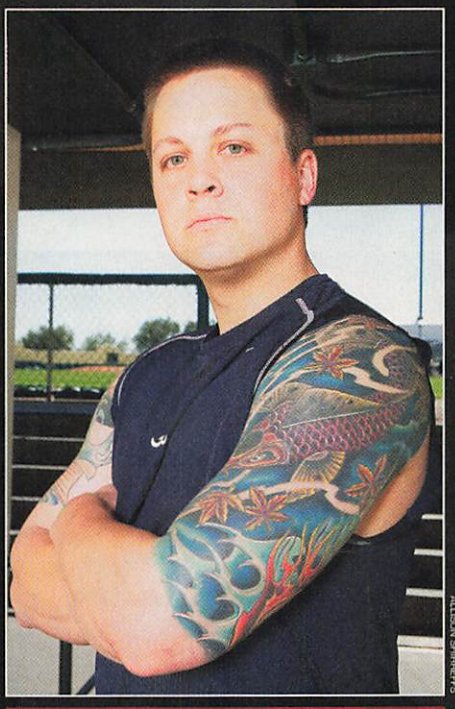
"I got my first tattoo in the off-season in 2008," he said. "I was living in Newport Beach, California, and my roommate was going to get a tattoo. I'm a go-with-the-flow kind of guy, so I got one, too."

Medlen's tattoo was a koi, a Japanese carp, and a traditional and popular tattoo. Koi generally symbolize courage and overcoming challenges to attain goals, but symbolism wasn't behind Medlen's thinking.

"Koi are super trendy, so I guess that means my tats are, too," he said. "But I did it for the artwork."

His original tattoos, which were just the outline, or "black work," of the koi, took about six hours apiece to complete and were, in his words, "nothing special."

When Medlen heard about Bond, he decided to have him add color and other flourishes to take his existing tattoos to the next level.



ALLISON SHREFFS

Medlen sat through three sessions totaling 32 hours to have his original half-sleeve koi tattoos enhanced and colored.

"It took three sessions to get it finished," recalled Medlen. "A 14-hour session during the All-Star break, a 12-hour session at the end of the season, and six hours just a few days before camp."

Medlen is pleased with the finished product. The formerly non-descript black-ink tattoo now looks like a true Japanese-inspired tat, featuring a colorful koi swimming in blue waves with coral-colored leaves.

Schafer currently sports half-sleeves reflecting an Italian Renaissance influence, but that's not how his tattoos started. Schafer came to Bond with two quotations tattooed on his left shoulder and bicep. One, which a friend sent him during what he calls the lowest point of his life, a 50-game suspension in 2008 for violating Major League Baseball's performance enhancing drug policy, reads, "Our scars become the marks that push us to greatness."

The other quotation attributed to a number of sources from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Confucius to Vince Lombardi reads, "Our greatest glory is not in rising but in the rising after the fall."

There were other unimpressive elements to Schafer's tattoo, stars and banners, but with his arm, Bond had a little more room to express his artisanship.

"Jordan came in with more blank space than the other guys," said Bond. "That gave me a lot of room for creativity."

Bond keeps hundreds of files with thousands of images on his laptop computer. He looked through these while formulating a plan for Schafer's left shoulder, eventually taking his inspiration from Michelangelo's famous "Pieta" sculpture and a portion of the fresco from the Sistine Chapel called, "The Creation of Man."

Schafer didn't want color. He wanted all the work to be black ink, which gives the piece a distinctly "Old World" feel.

The finished piece is stunning. It features delicate swirling clouds and two angels, male and female, reaching out their arms to each other. There's also the serene face of the Madonna on the underside of the bicep, scrollwork with aged and curling edges surround the quotes, and stars framed in angel's wings appear to point heavenward. The attention to detail is breathtaking. Shading gives the work movement and dimension, and it's easy to imagine the same piece laid out flat on a canvas hanging in a gallery.

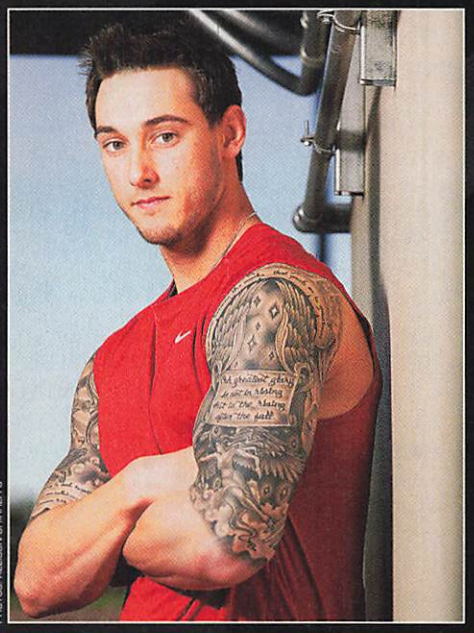
Schafer was so pleased with his left arm that he had the right one done with many of the same motifs, along with a Bible verse, Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work out for the good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose." There also are two spikes forming a cross and the quotation, "Hard work demands respect."

Schafer estimates the total time devoted to the work was between 30 and 40 hours, all performed in increments, of course.

By contrast, Bond's tattoo on Prado, also done during last year's All-Star break, was a walk in the park.

"It was the smallest tattoo I've done in probably six years," said Bond.

Prado received a black ink Florentine-



PHOTOS: ALLISON SHRAEFFS

Jordan Schafer sports black-ink half sleeves with an "Old World" look that feature quotations and (R) the serene face of the Madonna overlooking an angel.

style cross, probably seven to eight inches in length, tattooed on his left bicep. In the center of the cross is a star with a script "M," in honor of his two grandfathers, Martin and Manuel, for whom he's named. The cross looks as though it has wings, and there are rays of light over the top point.

Prado was concerned about his ability to swing a bat after he got the tattoo, but was reassured that his arm would heal just fine, and in fact, he never missed a beat after getting it.

Aftercare for a tattoo varies, according to Bond, but the artist recommends his clients keep the tattoo out of sunlight and wrapped in plastic for several hours, then clean it several times a day with mild soap and warm water, and finally lightly apply a special ointment called H2Ocean. The ointment is used until the tattoo begins to peel, like sunburn.

Moylan made a promise to Bond last year as he was having his tattoos enhanced.

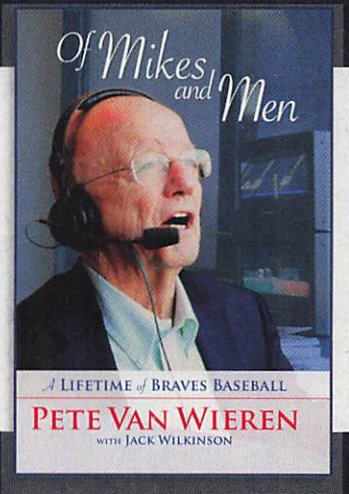
"He wanted to know when I was going to give him some blank skin to work on," said Moylan. "He gets to have my back, but he'll have to work in the Southern Cross."

And Moylan is giving Bond absolute artistic control over the art.

"I have complete trust in him," said Moylan. "I've seen what he's done, and it's fantastic. I know he's going to come up with something amazing."

Priority one for Bond, though, is finishing Moylan's right arm, which can't be done until the end of the season.

"Which will hopefully be after October," said Bond, a true Braves fan. "I've already begun plotting what I want to do, and whenever the season ends, we've booked four days in a row. We'll tattoo non-stop before he leaves for Australia."



THE "VOICE" OF THE BRAVES TELLS HIS STORY

Now the Atlanta Braves' Hall of Fame broadcaster, **Pete Van Wieren**, tells his memorable life story in *Of Mikes and Men*, a must-have autobiography by a man who has witnessed all the highs and lows of Atlanta Braves baseball.

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—**Don Sutton** complimenting Pete's work ethic

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PAINTING THE CORNERS

BY JAY BUSBEE

BOBBY COX'S LAST OPENING DAY

ALLISON SHIRREFFS

Bobby Cox has always had his players' backs, and they, in return, will try to pay him back with a season worthy of his legendary status.

NOSTALGIA'S a tricky thing. Remembering the best of days gone by can wrap you in warmth and make you pine for times past. But if you're not careful, it can blind you to the fact that the present day's not such a bad place to be, either.

Over the next six months, you'll be bombarded with Bobby Cox testimonials, recollections and remembrances. We've started our own series right here in ChopTalk, and virtually every spring training preview of the Braves has referenced Cox's final season in some way. Hundreds of former players, thousands of opponents, millions of fans will be tipping their caps to the departing Braves manager this season.

All with good reason. Cox is one of the most important figures in Atlanta sports history, a near-certain Hall of Famer who deserves his own statue outside the stadium. (It'd have to be one of him leaning on the dugout railing, casting a skeptical eye at the umps.) He deserves the full hero's sendoff, standing ovations at every home game, rocking chairs and other gifts from every opponent as he visits them one last time. (I bet Philly just gets him a couple of cheesesteaks.)

Thing is, through all this celebration, Bobby's still got a job to do. He's going to be heading up a team that's as talented as any in the – oh, let's call this the Braves' "post-playoff" era. His pitching staff is one of the best in the National League, and he can deploy an intriguing mix of veterans and rookies that, if they gel, could knock around any team in the majors. A return to the post-season isn't out of the question.

Following the playoff run late last year was like finding an old favorite CD you hadn't heard for years. You forget just how much fun it can be, checking boxscores and keeping an anxious eye on the West-coast games.

> COX ISN'T JUST FACING THE NATIONAL LEAGUE EAST THIS YEAR - HE'S FACING HIS OWN HISTORY.

So, with that in mind, I plan to look on this last season with Cox in charge as a chance to know what we've got before it's gone. There'll be plenty to appreciate.

I'll enjoy the way he hangs out in the dugout before games, greeting everyone from reporters to lucky fans. Unless you slept at the park the night before, Bobby will be there before you, and he'll already be halfway into a story when you arrive.

I'll enjoy the way he barks encouragement at his players, slapping a "-y" on the end of just about everybody's name. (Tip for the Braves.com web guys: create a "Bobby Cox Nickname Generator.") I'll enjoy the way he yaps at every pitch and, every so often, slowly makes his way out to argue calls with umps, all part of the master psychological game he plays with every opponent.

I'll enjoy Bobby's post-game quotes – or, more specifically, the struggle to get Bobby's post-game quotes.

After every game, the members of the print and broadcast media file dutifully into Bobby's office, and Bobby, in turn, offers up a reliably protective defense of his players. If a pitcher surrendered a pair of grand slams, Bobby would say he hit his marks on all but a couple pitches. If a batter lined into a doubleplay to snuff out a scoring chance, Bobby would say he made "great contact" on the ball.

Trying to get Bobby off-message is like playing chess with only pawns – it can be done, but boy, it ain't easy.

And that's just the public face on the side of Bobby that keeps players satisfied in Atlanta – the way he goes to the wall for them regardless of circumstance. We should all be so lucky to have a boss like Bobby – demanding as heck, but always willing to take up our cause against the outside. His guys could bounce a ball off the opponents' dugout wall and he'd think it was a strike. Opponents could put it on a tee, and he'd protest that it was out of the strike zone. You've got to love that kind of devotion. This year's rookies will learn lessons from Cox that they'll carry through into the 2020s, and that's just about the highest praise you can give a manager.

Every baseball season is both exhilarating and exhausting, and 2010 will be emotional, as well. Cox isn't just facing the National League East this year - he's facing his own history. He's facing Worst to First and The Night Sid Slid and the World Champions and the Baby Braves and all those other spectacular seasons. It's tough trying to outdo your own legend, but I'm looking forward to seeing him try.

So, enough with the nostalgia. Let's play some ball.

A Wife's Pitch

BY CAROLYN LOWE

THE SPRING TRAINING "FIRE DRILL!"

REPORTING TO SPRING TRAINING is a lot like Christmas for me. It happens about the same time every year, I get really excited as the date approaches, I prepare (or try to) for a long time, and yet it always has a way of sneaking up on me!

Sure, moving a family and two six-month-old Golden Retriever "puppies" of some 65 pounds each 300 miles for six weeks is no easy task, but it's not exactly relocating Mount Rushmore either. And yet 48 hours before the Lowe Caravan is set to depart Fort Myers, I'm still staring at the 15 or so multi-colored, sticky note to-do lists I have plastered around the kitchen to motivate me to get motivated... from the comfort of the sofa!

No boxes have been packed. The cars haven't been taken to the local Jiffy-Lube for oil-changes and tire-pressure checks. The refrigerator hasn't been cleaned out. And not only have I failed to take a spare set of keys to the neighbor, I have yet to even make my way to Home Depot to get a duplicate set made.

You get the picture. I'm a procrastinator. No, I'm a mess! Just like Christmas. I make lists of great gift ideas for friends and family, but somehow, they all end up with fruitcake.

As for Derek, he's a different story. Preparing for spring training is a breeze for him. He doesn't make lists. He just does stuff.

While I'm lining up suitcases and folding the kids' clothes into piles to make sure everything will fit just right... he's throwing clothes - hangers and all - into the trunk of his car. Custom suits tossed without care right next to a pair of boxer shorts that may or may not be clean. Baseball spikes, caked with clay, thrown on top of the white dress shirt I actually managed to pick up from the cleaners yesterday.

DEREK LOWE

Carolyn Lowe makes sure Maximus and Moxie are ready for the trip from Fort Myers to Orlando... Guess whose fingers are showing over the left edge of the lens?

> NONE OF MY RENTAL INFORMATION MENTIONED AN ALARM... YOU WOULD HAVE THOUGHT WE WERE TRYING TO BREAK INTO A SWISS BANK!

Who can pack like that? It's madness! But when he passed me with a sigh and a smile and said, "Hi, Honey... I'm done. Need any help?" I blew my frizzy hair out of my face, wiped the sweat off my forehead, and replied, "No, I'm fine." He laughed and went to sit in his recliner and watch Investigation Discovery. I wasn't jealous - I think it was a re-run.

Inevitably, the morning of February 19 arrived. I awoke early, and although the number of sticky notes in the kitchen had decreased, there were still quite a few mocking me while I tried to enjoy my morning coffee.

Thankfully, Derek reassured me we didn't have to be in a hurry to hit the road. This was a pleasant surprise. He's usually a get-up-and-go kind of guy. I must really have looked bad. As I fingered the bags under my eyes, I poured myself another cup of coffee.

By noon, I had done it. The cars were packed to the gills, and the lists that remained would have to wait until October!

We walked the dogs one more time, prayed their anti-nausea medicine would kick in, loaded them into the back of the Escalade, and I followed Derek's car out of the driveway.

The drive from Fort Myers to Orlando is pretty boring: I-75 north for three hours, and then east on I-4 for 30 minutes. Thankfully, Tiger Woods had just spoken for the first time in three months, and although I'm not one to capitalize on another's misfortune, the banter on talk radio made the miles fly by.

As it turned out, though, Tiger was topped by another circus act on this normally uneventful trip.

As I approached I-4, traffic began to slow. I thought it was just normal Friday gridlock... until I saw it. Chugging along in the right lane was a vividly painted school bus with music blaring from the rooftop and a camel hanging out of the back! Seriously... a real-live camel! And to top it

all off, the animal appeared to be bee-bopping to the music, swaying this way and that as it leaned toward the Chevy Blazer that tailgated close behind.

Laughing myself to tears, I picked up my cell phone to call Derek. He was a ways behind me after making a pit stop somewhere along I-75. I warned him of what was ahead and said it would be a crying shame if his small bladder kept him from seeing, "Sir Gus," the dancing camel-on-wheels.

It wasn't more than five minutes later that Derek called me back. Before he could get a word out through his hysterical laughter, I butted-in, asking if he saw the spectacle.

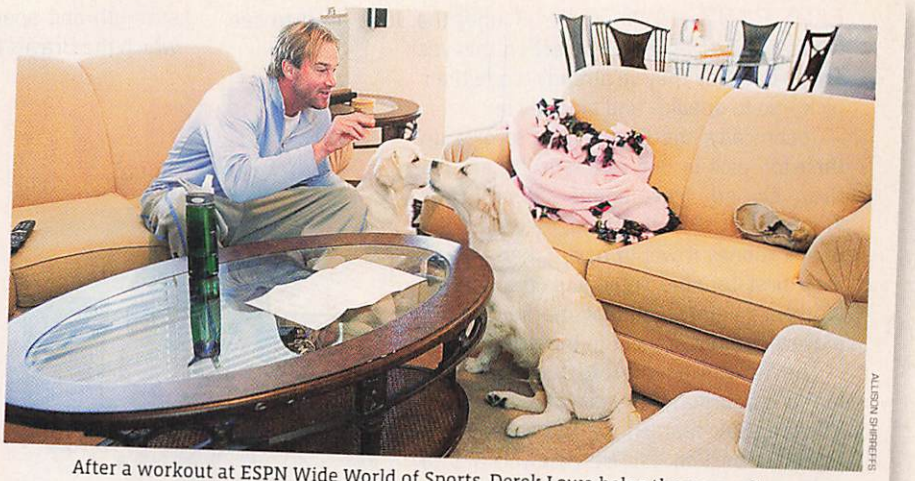
"Oh, I saw it," he bellowed, "because the cops pulled it over!"

As I tried to wrap my mind around that, I wondered, "How are they going to write that ticket?"

We finally pulled up to our rental home, ready to unload and plop down on the couch for what we considered some well-deserved R-and-R, but the new abode had other ideas. I shoved open the door, only to be met with a horribly loud beeping sound.

Derek stared at me with confusion and, quite frankly, a bit of disgust. But before he could give me a piece of his mind, the dogs freaked out, forcing Derek to focus all his attention on just staying vertical.

None of my rental information mentioned an alarm! I didn't know the code to turn it off. Thirty seconds felt like an eternity... and then it happened. Lights started flashing from inside, and the annoying beeping turned into an ear-shattering siren. You would have thought we were trying to break into a Swiss bank!



ALLISON SPRAFKIN

After a workout at ESPN Wide World of Sports, Derek Lowe helps the pups adjust to their temporary spring training home.

I ran frantically back to the car to begin the search-and-rescue for the rental company's information. You can guess how that went - I failed to make a list of where I packed it.

Meanwhile, Derek was still trying to untangle himself from what had become a prison of dog leashes when another kind of flashing lights arrived on the scene. Yep, Sir Gus wasn't the only one to have a run-in with the law this frantic Friday!

While explaining ourselves to the sheriff's deputies was a bit humiliating ("Yeah, sure, you're Derek Lowe!"), we were eventually able to prove we belonged there. With a couple of departing handshakes, we made our way inside, closed the door, and could only laugh.

Just another uneventful start to the season for the Lowe Family. Can't wait to see what the drive to Atlanta has in store!

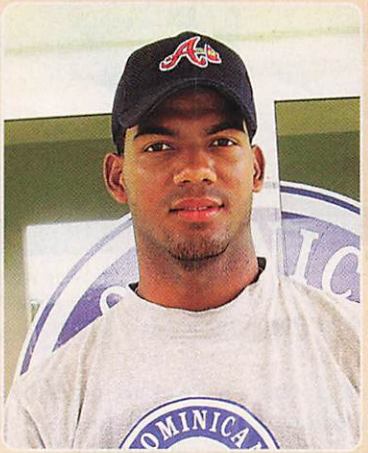
STEVE STEVENSON

The Lowes' drive to spring training included this scene along I-4 when Polk County sheriff's deputies - seen getting carrots from Clay Kraft of Orlando's Bahia Shrine to feed the camel - pulled over Sir Gus and his colorful bus. The camel is an "ambassador" for the Shrine.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Carolyn Lowe, the wife of pitcher Derek Lowe, will be contributing a monthly column to ChopTalk throughout the season, providing a unique perspective for our readers. Carolyn has a B.A. in communications from Boston College and has eight years of professional journalism experience as an on-air host, anchor and reporter in the television industry. This is her first print journalism venture.

NO NO. 1? NO PROB!



SPECIAL

FANS DON'T HAVE TO WAIT until the June draft to see who's the Braves' No. 1 selection this year. That's because they've already made their pick - so to speak - and signed him.

Technically, the Braves had to give up their top pick in this year's draft because they signed free agent closer Billy Wagner. Not to be deterred, they used the bonus money it would have taken to sign their first-rounder to acquire the equivalent on the international market, where players are not subject to the draft.

The Braves announced the signing of highly regarded 18-year-old shortstop Edward Salcedo (R) of the Dominican Republic on Feb. 23. He received a $1.6 million signing bonus, the largest ever awarded by the organization on the international market.

"We felt he was the top player available internationally this year," said Johnny Almaraz, the Braves' international scouting director. "He has a lot of tools, and he has the type of frame that projects very well as he gets older. We feel he is a significant addition to our organization and a young man with a very real opportunity to play at the major league level down the road."

Salcedo is physically advanced for his age. He stands 6-foot-3 and weighs 190 pounds. Scouts rave about his arm strength and speed. He also generates excellent bat speed, which the Braves believe will allow him to develop above-average power as his strong body matures.

The Braves emerged as Salcedo's top choice due to the work of Almaraz and Latin American scouting supervisor Roberto Aquino. Salcedo initially attracted attention in 2007 when the Cleveland Indians entered negotiations with his representative at the time, Scott Boras. The Indians were prepared to sign Salcedo for $2 million before questions arose about whether or not he was too young to sign.

The Braves requested an investigation by Major League Baseball about Salcedo's age. His birthdate has since been verified as July 30, 1991. Then the club was able to come to terms with the player's new representative, Edgar Mercedes. Salcedo arrived at spring training on Mar. 12 to take his physical and finalize the deal.

There's already speculation that Salcedo could move to third base with relative ease if he should outgrow shortstop.

Salcedo is not the only international player to sign recently with the Braves. The organization also came to terms on a minor league contract with Nicaraguan shortstop Ivan Marin.

- BILL BALLEW

HANK'S HOME

THE OPENING CEREMONY of the Hank Aaron Childhood Home & Museum, scheduled Wednesday, April 14, in Mobile, Ala., is turning into quite an affair. All members of the National Baseball Hall of Fame have been invited, and Ozzie Smith, RickeyHenderson, Bruce Sutter and Bob Feller have confirmed they will attend.

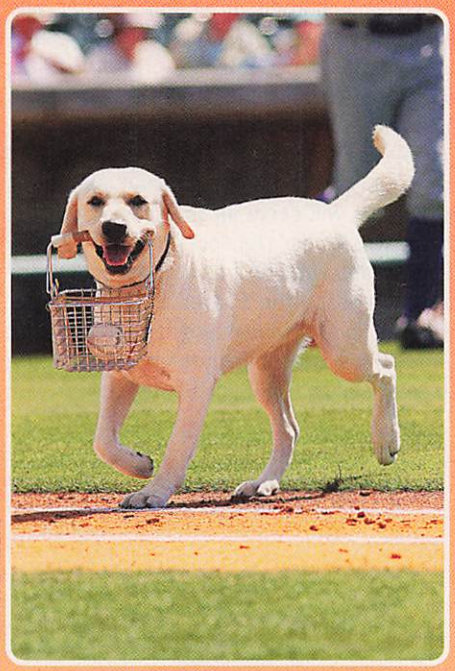
The dedication is scheduled for 5 p.m. (Central) before the Mobile BayBears open their home season at Hank Aaron Stadium against the Birmingham Barons.

Aaron and family members will be there, as well as Bud Selig, commissioner of Major League Baseball. They will be joined by Pat O'Conner, president of Minor League Baseball, former major leaguer Don Mincher, president of the Southern League, and Jeff Idelson, president of the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

The Mobile home Aaron grew up in was moved from its original location to Gaslight Park at Hank Aaron Stadium, where it is being renovated into a museum that will house many items of memorabilia from Aaron's career, and will highlight other aspects of his life. It also will include information about life in Mobile in the 1940s, when Aaron's father built the house, as well as baseball in Mobile.

Game tickets are on sale at mobilebaybears.com starting at $7 per person ($5 for children).

DOG SHOW



MYRTLE BEACH PELICANS

FANS AND STAFF of the Myrtle Beach Pelicans were saddened early last fall when Dinger, the beloved "Home Run Dog" since the team's inception in 1999, passed away. Fortunately, the club was prepared for the inevitable, with Dinger's younger brother Deuce ready to handle the responsibility as the franchise's mascot.

An English yellow Labrador, Deuce (above) arrived on the scene at BB&T Coastal Field as a puppy in 2008 and last year began handling the bat-fetching duties and delivering balls in a basket to the umpires.

Though considered by some employees as "a somewhat slower learner" than Dinger, Deuce has mastered all the in-game chores of his predecessor, including the post-game victory lap around the bases. He also serves as the team's official greeter in the front office and gift shop, that is when he's not performing his favorite activity - napping.

"He's well behaved most of the time," said Maggie Neil, the Pelicans' director of promotions. "He's a sweet dog, very laid-back, much like Dinger was. And based on every indication I've been getting from him, Deuce is looking forward to getting the season started."

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

LINE THE FIELD

BASEBALL IS A GAME OF INCHES, so great care is taken when preparing Turner Field for games. The Braves' grounds crew follows a process that accurately draws the baselines before each home game.

A four-wheel device called a "chalker" (below) helps makes this possible. It's basically a galvanized tub that holds about 50 pounds of chalk.

"It has a paddle wheel inside it and an opening at the bottom which you can either adjust for a two-inch line or a four-inch line," said Braves field director Ed Mangan. "As you push the wheels, it drives the paddles, which slowly feeds the chalk out the bottom of the unit and drops it in a four-inch wide strip."

To make sure the chalker fills in the precisely correct spot, the grounds crew uses a string line. One crew member operates the chalker, while two others stretch out each end of the string. Once the string line gets set down in the proper position, the chalker follows it throughout the process. Mangan estimates that completing the foul lines and the batter's box takes 10 minutes.

"For the batter's box, we have people that do different things," said Mangan. "[Somebody will] lay out the template, scratch that in, and then go do something else. So, when the guy with the chalker comes around, he can follow the scribes in the ground."

The foul lines that run across the grass and extend to the outfield foul poles require less maintenance than the heavily trafficked baselines. Once every three or four days, the grounds crew repaints them. They set down a template and use a hand sprayer to fill in the line.

- STEVE FALL

ATLANTA BRAVES

VERY SPECIAL ASSISTANT

THE BRAVES named 305-game winner and future Hall of Famer **Tom Glavine** special assistant to team president **John Schuerholz**. Glavine, 43, will assist Schuerholz on various baseball and business projects and will work on occasional special assignments for **Frank Wren** and **Bobby Cox**. In addition to his baseball operations duties, Glavine will serve as an occasional guest for the Braves Radio Network Pre-Game Show (see below), and will serve as a guest analyst for selected games on the Braves Radio Network. He also will join broadcasters **Chip Caray** and **Joe Simpson** as a guest analyst for Sunday home games televised by FOX SportSouth.

(L-R) Leo Mazzone, Pete Van Wieren and Joe Simpson help Tom Glavine celebrate being named to the Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame that will induct him June 12 (see below).

WARMING UP

Tom Glavine, **Mark Lemke** and **Leo Mazzone**, three individuals strongly associated with the Braves' success in the 1990s, will serve as co-hosts of the new Atlanta Braves Pre-Game show on 680 The Fan, Rock 100.5 and Braves Radio Network affiliates before Braves games. They will be joined by former University of Georgia quarterback **Buck Belue**, former Atlanta TV sportscaster **Chuck Dowdle** and new Gwinnett Braves broadcaster **Mike Morgan**. Glavine will appear on the show prior to Friday home games, and Lemke, Mazzone, Belue, Dowdle and Morgan will be on before every game. The show will begin 75 minutes prior to the scheduled first pitch of each game and will include player interviews and a **Bobby Cox** segment.

COOPERSTOWN TUNEUP

Tom Glavine has to wait until 2014 before he will be on the ballot for election to the National Baseball Hall of Fame. However, he'll receive a taste of immortality June 12 when he's inducted into the Atlanta Sports Hall of Fame. The ceremony is set for the Rialto Center for the Arts at Georgia State University in downtown Atlanta (80 Forsyth St.), beginning with a reception and silent auction at 5 p.m., followed by the awards ceremony at 6:30 and an 8 p.m. VIP party. Individual tickets range from $20 to $100. To obtain tickets, call **Larry Winter** at (770) 343-9012 or e-mail atlantasportshalloffame@yahoo.com.

SHOWMAN

Rookie rightfielder **Jason Heyward** was the talk of early spring training, both for his overall play and for remarkable demonstrations of power. It all began with batting practice during the first full-squad workout Feb. 23 at ESPN Wide World of Sports. Heyward drove a number of balls over the outfield wall, including one that broke the sunroof of assistant GM **Bruce Manno**'s car, causing more than $3,000 in damage. True to Heyward's reputation, he later apologized to Manno.

On Mar. 8, Heyward hit his first Grapefruit League home run, one that made quite an impression. After falling behind 0-2 against Detroit's Max Scherzer (formerly with Arizona), he worked the count to 3-2 and then unloaded a first-inning blast at the Tigers' Lakeland ballpark that traveled an estimated 450 feet, well over the right-field fence and off the metal roof of a batting practice building.

Only 20 years old, Heyward is rated the top prospect in all of minor league baseball. Though he was showing strong signs of being ready to open the season in Atlanta, that decision had not been made at press time and probably wouldn't be made until shortly before the April 5 Opening Day game with the Cubs at Turner Field (4 p.m.).

THE OPENER

Derek Lowe, who won 15 games last year to tie **Javier Vazquez** for the team lead, is scheduled to start Opening Day against the Cubs at Turner Field (4 p.m., SportSouth and ESPN). **Bobby Cox** announced his rotation plans Feb. 28, uncharacteristically early. This will be Lowe's second straight Opening Day start for the Braves. Last year, he beat the Phillies, 4-1, allowing just two hits in eight innings of work. Cox said Lowe would be followed in order by **Jair Jurrjens**, **Tommy Hanson** and **Tim Hudson**. Fifth starter **Kenshin Kawakami** will be skipped the first time because of off days in the schedule.

Lowe suffered a setback Mar. 10 in his second spring start when he had to leave after one inning (27 pitches when 50 were planned) due to a blister on his right big toe. The Braves and Lowe did not expect the injury to keep him from being ready for the opener.

SHORT HOPS

- **Jair Jurrjens** experienced some shoulder discomfort shortly before reporting to spring training. The Braves ordered an MRI as a precautionary measure, and the results showed inflammation but no structural damage. Rest and treatment appeared to clear up the problem.

- **Martin Prado** lost a reported 14 pounds over the winter by following the P90X fitness program used last year by **Matt Diaz**.

- Infield candidate **Diory Hernandez** hurt his left (non-throwing) shoulder sliding during the Dominican winter league and required surgery. He's expected to be out until roughly mid-season.

- **Jordan Schafer**, last year's Opening Day centerfielder, was making steady progress from hand surgery.

- Former catcher **Javy Lopez** (1992-2003), sporting a beard, was in camp as a guest instructor.

- **Chipper Jones** sat out the Mar. 7 game against Houston with a bruised thumb but returned Mar. 9 against the Phillies. Chipper reported to spring training at 232 pounds (seven ponds heavier than last spring and 17 pounds heavier than at the end of '09) after strengthening his upper body in the off-season. He also had his father and personal hitting coach, **Larry Jones**, with him to help work on his swing.

- New first baseman **Troy Glaus**, coming off shoulder surgery early last year that limited him to only 29 at-bats with St. Louis, reported he went through full off-season workouts with no problems and had no limitations in spring training. At one point early in Grapefruit League games, he strung together eight straight hits.

- **Jason Heyward** sustained a very minor upper back injury Mar. 9 when he jumped into the wall chasing a **Jayson Werth** home run, but after **Bobby Cox** held him out one game, he was ready to play again.

WE FEEL VERY GOOD ABOUT OUR 25 PLAYERS

WE HAVE A LOT FEWER question marks as to what our players' performance will be than we did a year ago at this time.

Last year, we were hoping for improvement out of players and maturing of players. This year, we have a lineup full of more consistent performers. Their track records show they're able to perform over the course of a season at a higher level. It's a different hitting team this time around.

There are no concerns right now other than staying healthy. If we stay healthy, we think our 25 guys are in camp, and we feel real good about all of them. It looks like there are some guys going to Gwinnett that would have made the team many years.

A lot of good things have happened so far in spring training. It's been fun to watch, but we still have three weeks left before we go to Atlanta as I write this.

Jason Heyward's been really good all spring. He's handling the attention and everything that's been thrown at him. To this point, he's done everything we could ask, but the really tough stuff will come the last 10 days.

Chipper Jones scorched the ball off (Phillies ace) Roy Halladay and overall has looked fine. His upper body looks stronger.

The off-season additions of Troy Glaus, Melky Cabrera and Billy Wagner have been really positive so far. They're doing exactly what we wanted them to do. Glaus has made a very smooth transition to first base. He's shown he's the big bat in the middle of the lineup that we really needed.

Wagner adds a presence at closer and leadership in the bullpen that we haven't had in a while. The last time we had that was when John Smoltz was out there (2004).

> "OFFENSIVELY, THE LINEUP MATCHES UP WITH THE BETTER CLUBS IN THE LEAGUE, WHICH WE DIDN'T HAVE LAST YEAR."

In the case of Melky, he fits in perfectly. He's shown all the abilities we'd heard about to play a variety of positions and hit about anywhere in lineup.

My expectations about our club are that we're better positioned to support our good pitching than we were a year ago. Offensively, the lineup matches up with the better clubs in the league, which we didn't have last year. And our pitching clearly does that, just like it did last year.

I think we have a division where all five teams are capable of winning on any given night. The Marlins have good pitching. The Mets, if they're healthy, have a lot of All-Star caliber players. The Nationals are improved. And the Phillies, of course, are two-time National League champs and still are very good.

I think at least three clubs in the division, and possibly four, have a chance to go to the post-season.

Last month, I talked about my special assistants, and this month I want to talk about more key people in baseball operations.

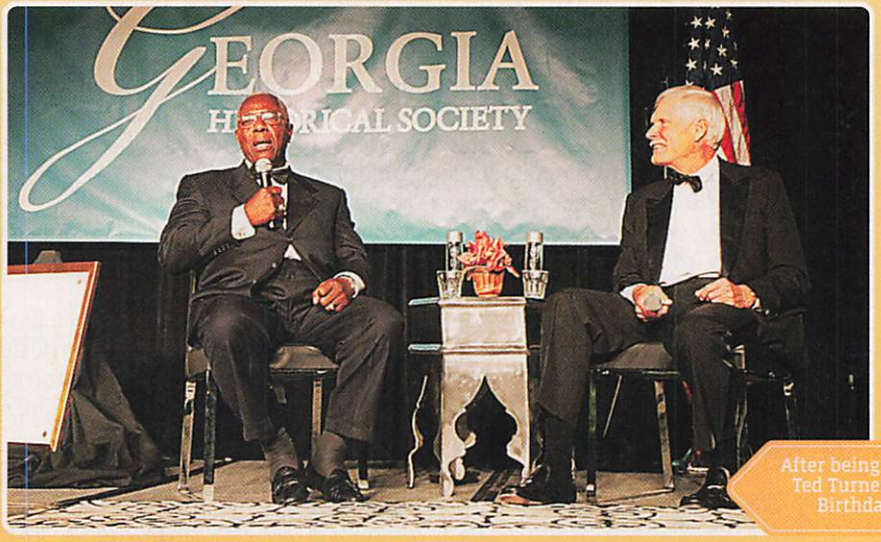
Kurt Kemp does a tremendous job of running a big department as director of player development. That department has close to 200 players and dozens of staff members. It's a job that requires a lot of attention, and Kurt does a great job of keeping it all organized.

Johnny Almaraz, director of international scouting and operations, has had a huge impact since joining us (January '08) and has put us in position to sign some of the top talent. We're in play for the premium players internationally.

Tony DeMacio is director of scouting and a long-time Brave that signed Chipper and Tom Glavine. He took over as director last year and has done a tremendous job of putting together a top-notch staff and preparing for the next wave of talent in the draft. He has the utmost respect throughout baseball.

And Ronnie Richardson, our assistant director of player development, is a young guy with tremendous potential in the game that continues to grow.

TOGETHER AGAIN



RUSS BRYANT COURTESY OF THE GEORGIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

After being named Georgia Trustees, Hank Aaron and Ted Turner speak to the crowd at the Georgia Days Birthday Bash and Awards Gala in Savannah.

FORMER BRAVES owner **Ted Turner** and Hall of Famer **Hank Aaron** were inducted together Feb. 13 as Georgia Trustees at the Georgia Days Birthday Bash and Awards Gala in Savannah. The honor is regarded as the highest the state can give to an individual. The original trustees were appointed by England's **King George II** in 1732 to establish the colony of Georgia. Governor **Sonny Perdue** inducted Turner and Aaron into the Georgia Historical Society's Georgia Trustees at the event.

TICKET WINDOW

Individual single game tickets are on sale at braves.com/tickets, the Braves' ticket office at Turner Field, the Braves Clubhouse Store at the CNN Center, all Publix Ticketmaster outlets, or by calling 1-800-745-3000. Regular prices (premium prices) are Skyline (available only at Turner Field two and a half hours before games) $1 ($1), Upper Pavilion $6 ($8), Upper Reserved $8 ($12), Upper Box $12 ($16), Terrace Reserved $24 ($28), Field/Terrace Pavilion $24 ($28), Field Reserved $28 ($32), Golden Moon Casino Pavilion $28 ($32), Terrace Level $36 ($40), Field Level $38 ($42), Golden Moon Casino Level $44 ($48), Dugout Level $64 ($68), Henry Aaron Seats $74 ($78).

Premium games include Opening Day, July 4, and all Friday and Saturday regular season games. Promotions this year include Magnetic Schedule giveaway on April 16 and 17. **Bobby Cox** Night is set for Oct. 2. There are 2-for-1 ticket offers every Monday (2 Golden Moon Casino Pavilion for $28), Tuesday (2 Upper Reserved for $8) and Wednesday (2 Field/Terrace Pavilion for $24). Fans with college or military ID or a AAA card also can purchase two Upper Box tickets for the price of one. All-you-can-eat seats start as low as $45.

RALLY TIME

Fans can help **Brian McCann**'s crusade against childhood cancer by making a pledge for every home run he hits this season. McCann and his wife, **Ashley**, have launched the McCann 16 Home Run Challenge that allows fans to participate at one of four sponsorship levels. Double A sponsors pledge $1.60 per home run. Triple A sponsors pledge $16 per home run. Big League sponsors pledge $160 per home run. The fourth option allows fans to create their own pledge amount.

Atlantans **Skip** and **Victoria Moore** and family have pledged $1,000 per McCann home run to the Rally Foundation for Childhood Cancer Research. In the three years that the McCanns have been involved with Rally, the foundation has awarded more than $1 million in research grants while supporting 40 projects in 23 hospitals nationwide. Visit mccann16.org to make a pledge or obtain more information.

JOIN THE CLUB!

Mary Snelson, a long-time Braves fan and an Atlanta native, has launched the Atlanta Braves Fan Club. Membership is $25 for one year or $40 for two years. Benefits include discounted tickets to sit with the club members in a designated section at Turner Field, member's only events, special premiums and ticket giveaways. The group will have its first tailgate party April 17 from 4-6 p.m. in the Turner Field Blue Lot before the Braves-Rockies game. More details are available at atlantabravesfanclub.com where fans can sign up for the group with a credit card.

WHAT A GUY

Even though **Tim Hudson** missed most of last season recovering from elbow surgery, the Atlanta Sports Council named him Sports Person of the Year during the organization's fifth annual black-tie event honoring the most accomplished athletes and teams in metro Atlanta. Since Hudson was in Florida for spring training, his wife, **Kim**, accepted on his behalf at the Fox Theatre's Egyptian Ballroom Mar. 8.

HELPING HAITI

The Braves donated 45 boxes containing more than 1,000 Braves polo shirts and 350 Braves jackets to Fashion Delivers, a non-profit organization that helps collect clothing for victims of disasters and those in need throughout the year. Through the combined

effort of Fashion Delivers and Operation Compassion, the donated Braves apparel, valued at more than $22,000 will be delivered to Haiti. The Braves also partnered with the American Red Cross and MedShare International to aid both organizations' Haiti Relief Efforts. Donations from the Atlanta Braves Foundation and Braves fans will cover the $16,000 shipping expense incurred by MedShare to send a 12-ton freight, containing 1,200 boxes of medical face masks, shoe covers, crutches, sterile gloves, syringes, pediatric scales, stretchers, and other medical supplies to Haiti.

BALLS & STRIKES

- **Mike Morgan** will team with former Brave **Brian Jordan** to call 25 Gwinnett Braves televised games on CSS this year. Morgan is the TV voice of the NFL's Carolina Panthers and also calls college football, basketball and baseball for various networks. The two also were scheduled to work Braves spring training telecasts Mar. 30 (Yankees, 1:05 p.m.) and Mar. 31 (Astros, 1:05 p.m.) on CSS, a 24-hour cable TV sports channel.

- **Tim** and **Kim Hudson**'s Baseballs & Birdies Golf Tournament took place Feb. 21-23 at ChampionsGate Golf Club in Orlando. The tournament benefits the AFLAC Cancer Center at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta. Hudson's teammates who rallied for the cause by playing in the event included **Jesse Chavez**, **Matt Diaz**, **Michael Dunn**, **Chipper Jones**, **Craig Kimbrel**, **Derek Lowe**, **Brian McCann**, **Peter Moylan**, **Scott Proctor**, **Todd Redmond** and **Chris Resop**. A Braves on-field experience was auctioned for $2,600, and the total amount raised is expected to exceed $50,000.

- The Braves are looking for bands to entertain fans at Turner Field before home games. Country, rock, pop, cover, or original bands can submit their information for review at braves.com/bravesbands. Bands selected to perform before a game will receive free tickets to that night's game and a discount code for their followers to see them play. One group will be named the "Braves Band of the Year" and win a free suite to the final home game.

BOBBY COX

MANAGER

I LIKE OUR CHANCES OF COMING UP BIG!

OPENING AGAINST the Chicago Cubs at Turner Field will be exciting. There are a lot of Cubs fans all over the place, even in the South. So, between their fans and ours, Turner Field should be an exciting place to be!

There's no magic to getting off to a great start. Good pitching helps, but the best thing is to, knock wood, go injury free in spring training. When you start with the team you want to start with - your starting nine - it gives a lot of confidence. We're looking forward to getting off to a great start and having a great year.

Even though it was subject to change, I set up the Opening Day pitcher, Derek Lowe, really early, right before spring training games began, which is different for me. But I have a ton of confidence in Derek. He's a veteran, eats up innings, and will leave it all out there. He can pitch big games, and we're relying on him.

I tried to set up the rotation so we could hopefully take care of the pitchers a little bit. We want to give some guys, like Tommy Hanson and Jair Jurrjens, a chance to pitch a good bit early, and give them an extra day of rest later in the season. We want to keep Tim Hudson strong for the stretch drive. He'll get an extra day of rest from time to time in the first half so we can ride him harder in the second half.

We'd like to do this as much as possible, but everything is subject to change. All pitchers need breathers from time to time. So that's the theory.

> "WE'VE GOT A SEASON TO PLAY. IT'S LONG, IT'S GOING TO BE A CHALLENGE, BUT IT'S GOING TO BE A LOT OF FUN."

The National League East is once again a strong division. The Florida Marlins are young but very talented. The New York Mets will have their injured guys back, and they're going to be vastly improved. The Washington Nationals have been one of those teams that surprises us from time to time. It's never a good idea to take any team for granted.

And the Philadelphia Phillies are good, basically the same team. Whether they had Cliff Lee or Roy Halladay, two of the best pitchers in baseball, they were going to be tough. So they have Halladay instead of Lee. They're still tough, and we'll face him a lot. They have a great offense, a great lineup.

All that said, we like our team and believe we have a good, if not better shot, at coming up big at the end of the season. That's our goal.

There's only so much we can do in practices or workouts, so the game situations of spring training are key. The players need this time, and we need it, too.

Take our first baseman, Troy Glaus, for example. He's a ballplayer. He knows how to play the game but hasn't played much at first. We feel very confident about his abilities and felt it even more when we watched him at spring training.

First base isn't an easy position to play, but Glaus is a complete player who works really hard. He's got great hands. I'm perfectly confident in his ability, but spring training games are really helpful for player position movement like that.

I honestly wasn't wistful as I approached spring training, not during the drive down, not when pitchers and catchers reported, not full-squad workouts. It was business as usual, because it has to be.

I'll have time to reflect after the season. But now we've got a season to play. It's long, it's going to be a challenge, but it's going to be a lot of fun.

PLAYING PEPPER

NATE McLOUTH

ALLISON SHIRRIFFS

The Braves acquired McLouth from Pittsburgh last June 3 in exchange for righthander Charlie Morton and prospects Jeff Locke, a lefty, and outfielder Gorkys Hernandez.

INTERVIEW BY
PATTY RASMUSSEN

CHOPTALK: How was the winter in Michigan?

NATE McLOUTH: It was good. My off-season consists of just hanging out. I like being at home, and I got to do a lot of that. So, I had a great off-season.

CT: When is Michigan going to beat Ohio State in football again? Do you bleed Big Blue?

McLOUTH: I do bleed Big Blue in every sport, and that question is a tough one! It's been a while since Michigan has won that game (six years), and it's a sore subject!

CT: Did you have any idea your eyes weren't quite right during last season? What was the indication that something was wrong?

McLOUTH: I realized it when I put on Brian McCann's glasses and I said, "Whoa!" All of a sudden, I could see better. It obviously wasn't my perfect prescription, but I could tell it was different enough to know that there was a problem. That happened with a couple of months to go in the season, but I knew getting used to contacts would take a while, so I waited until literally three days after the season. Once I got home, I went straight to the eye doctor.

CT: Did you ask about Lasik surgery, or is that even something you considered?

McLOUTH: I knew I preferred to wear contacts. I didn't speak to the doctor about Lasik, and he didn't bring it up. It's something I would be hesitant to do at this point anyway. I know most people who get it are happy with it, but it's something I'd rather wait until I'm done playing to consider it on the slight off chance that something could go wrong. And there's no reason to do it since contacts aren't a problem for me.

CT: How much correction did you need? Was it difficult adjusting to contacts? Can you tell a difference this spring in the way you're seeing the ball?

McLOUTH: I have near-sightedness, which for some reason affected me more at night with a lot of lights. In baseball stadiums, there are always a lot of lights, both the lights shining on the field and those on the scoreboards around the stadium. I was having difficulty seeing anything beyond 40 or 50 feet. When I put in the contacts for the first time, I looked out the window and said, "Wow!"

> "WHEN I PUT IN THE CONTACTS FOR THE FIRST TIME, I LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW AND SAID, 'WOW!'"

CT: You realized how much you were missing?

McLOUTH: Yeah, and I also realize it had been for a while. Everybody in my family has great vision, so we weren't always getting annual eye exams. The change took place over time, and I'm glad I realized there was a problem and they were able to fix it easily.

CT: What's the impact on the field? Are you seeing the ball better when you're in the outfield and at the plate?

McLOUTH: Definitely - and both. The best way I can describe it is like going from standard definition television to high definition. Everything is much clearer, and everything has sharpened up.

CT: You also had some hamstring issues last year. How is that?

McLOUTH: Everything feels good now. I was maybe 75 to 80 percent healthy at the end of the season. Some days were better than others, and that was a tough thing, because the way I play, the things I do on the field, I couldn't do those, especially the quick-sprint type stuff.

CT: You seemed to struggle a lot in the second half when most of the rest of the team was coming together and making a run at a playoff spot. Did that wear on you?

McLOUTH: Yeah, I didn't perform the way I should have performed. I'm not using my eyesight as an excuse for (my performance) at all, so it was frustrating for a lot of reasons. The hamstring injury made it tough to get the work done that I needed to get done. I'm glad to be past it. I worked really hard this off-season with stretching and flexibility so it wouldn't be an issue again this season.

CT: How does it feel to be with a team in spring training that appears to have a good chance to contend for the first time in your career?

McLOUTH: It's good. It is strange getting traded, which happens to a lot of people, but until it happens to you, it's nothing you think about. I just got here and sudden-

POLIYA DANAT / ATLANTA BRAVES

McLouth hit a combined .256 last year between the Pirates and Braves with 20 home runs, 70 RBIs and 19 steals.

ly I was playing games that meant something. I like this team a lot, and I like our chances. It's good to be here from the beginning of the season, in terms of the comfort level, to know people from last year, meet people coming in, and building relationships from the start instead of coming in halfway through.

CT: It looked like you fit in right away last season. Was the transition as seamless as it appeared?

McLOUTH: With my teammates, it was seamless, but it's a big deal moving from one city to another, to just pick up and suddenly you're playing in another city for another team. So, being traded to Atlanta was a shock, which is nothing against coming to Atlanta, but you're going from putting everything on the line for one team to the next day doing it for another organization. I think it's human nature to adjust a little slowly to that type of change, but I'm to the point that I am an Atlanta Brave, and I'm happy to be here.

McLouth won a Gold Glove for Pittsburgh in 2008, leading NL centerfielders with a .997 fielding percentage and making just one error.

CT: Do you like hitting leadoff? Is that where you want to hit this year?

McLOUTH: I like hitting leadoff, but I like hitting anywhere! I don't know if that's the spot in the order I would choose first, but if that's where the need lies, that's where I'm going to hit and will do my best at it. I'm definitely fine with hitting there this year.

CT: How do you like playing at Turner Field? How is it suited to the way you play - both at bat and in the field?

McLOUTH: I do like it. It has a spacious outfield. I think what I like most is that it's symmetrical, because a lot of ballparks have weird angles and walls with different heights and things like that. But Turner Field is a comfortable place to play.

CT: You gave No. 13 to Billy Wagner? What's the story behind that? Did you get anything in return? And why did you choose to wear No. 24?

McLOUTH: Billy's worn that number forever. He's been around a lot longer than me, and I was happy to give it to him. No donation, no payment was involved. I was happy to let him have it. I picked the number 24 because I like the (TV) show "24". Ever since I've been watching the show, that's the number I've wanted, but it's always been taken. It was free, and I took it. I'd like to stick with that number for the rest of my career.

CT: Well, you do look a little like Jack Bauer (lead character in "24" played by Kiefer Sutherland).

McLOUTH: Wow. That's the best compliment I've ever been paid!

CT: So, you're single?

McLOUTH: Actually, I got engaged over the off-season to a woman, Lindsey Rolen, I've known for a while. We've dated for about the past year. We're getting married on December 18.

CT: How did you propose? Was it a surprise, or did you pick out the ring together?

McLOUTH: We had talked about it, and we looked at rings together, because I wanted to be sure that I got something she liked. I'm not very good at picking out stuff like that on my own. I proposed on February 2. We were in the basement of my home, and I asked her and she said, "Yes."

POLIYA DANAT / ATLANTA BRAVES

(L-R) Tim Hudson, Tommy Hanson, Derek Lowe and Jair Jurrjens, along with Kenshin Kawakami (not shown) give the Braves a starting rotation that should rival any in the National League.

PLAYOFFS OR BUST!

Off-Season Additions Plus Last Year's Second-Half Run Provide Confidence That The Four-Year Drought Is Over

PHOTOS: POUYA DIANAT/ATLANTA BRAVES

BY GARY CARUSO

THE POST-SEASON used to be a given part of the season for the Braves. It was a glorious decade and a half, however those days and those games are gone but not forgotten. This year's team appears well-equipped, as well as very determined, to end the club's four-year absence from the playoffs and send Bobby Cox into managerial retirement with a big smile on his face and perhaps even a cigar in his mouth.

"This team is solid, from top to bottom, 1-25, whether it's the bullpen, the starting staff, the lineup, or the bench, and obviously one of the best managers in the game," said Chipper Jones. "We're not as sexy as some teams from a name-on-the-back-of-the-jersey standpoint, but I like this club.

"We have good ballplayers, and our success depends on health. If we stay healthy, people will be talking about us in August and September. We're in the same division as the NL representative to the World Series for the last two years. They (Phillies) are the favorites, and should be. That being said, we won the season series with them last year (9-6).

"We know we can play with them. It's a matter of taking care of business against everybody else."

The Braves dug an early hole last year (34-40, .459 start) and failed to climb all the way out of it in spite of a furious 50-32 (.610) rally when the club played its best extended stretch of baseball at least since the 14-year playoff streak ended in 2005.

Atlanta finished 86-76 (.531), seven games behind the Phillies and one game back of second-place Florida. Still, it was a 14-game improvement over 2008. It won't take nearly that big of a gain to unseat Philadelphia this year.

"There isn't a guy in this clubhouse who doesn't have going to the playoffs and winning it all on their mind," said Brian McCann. "Now we need to take it to the field."

Last year's success was built primarily on pitching. The Braves finished third in the NL in ERA (3.57) and led the majors in quality starts (99) and in fewest home runs allowed (119).

This year, the hitting appears stronger and more powerful, with a top-to-bottom batting order better suited for consistently supporting the work of the pitching staff than last season. However, only the games will prove whether or not that's true.

"Right now, it's all talk," said new closer Billy Wagner. "Until you get out there and do it on the field - compete and win - it's just talk, and everybody says the same thing."

Here's a look at what Cox has to work with in his final season.

STARTING PITCHING

With Javier Vazquez, possibly the best starter on last year's team, now working for the Yankees, is it too much of a stretch to

expect this year's rotation to be as good as last year's?

It depends...

Believe it or not, it's easy to project this year's five starters to be even better than last year's, if they stay healthy and perform to reasonable expectations, based primarily on what they've done previously in their careers. None necessarily have to have "career years," but with Jair Jurrjens being a young 24 and Tommy Hanson not turning 24 until Aug. 28, it isn't unreasonable to anticipate both of them pitching every bit as good as they did in 2009. If Jurrjens and Hanson make even moderate improvement - perhaps difficult based on how excellent they were a year ago but possible given their ages - then look out!

Jurrjens was 14-10 with a 2.60 ERA, third in the NL, last season. Hanson, who spent only four months in the majors last year, was 11-4 with a 2.89 ERA.

"Tommy Hanson and JJ (Jurrjens) have talent like I haven't seen in a long time on the same staff," said Tim Hudson. "One of those guys on a club is a GM's dream, but to have two that young and that good is really rare."

That leaves Opening Day starter Derek Lowe and Hudson, two of the more accomplished starters in the game who have been "aces" at some point in their careers, and Kenshin Kawakami, who pitched some of the best games on the staff last year.

Though Lowe tied Vazquez for the staff lead in wins (15) last year, his performance (15-10/4.67) was erratic and not up to his career standard by a long shot. In fact, his earned run average was a run higher than his lifetime ERA (3.75). It seems very reasonable that he'll be a significantly better pitcher than he was in 2009.

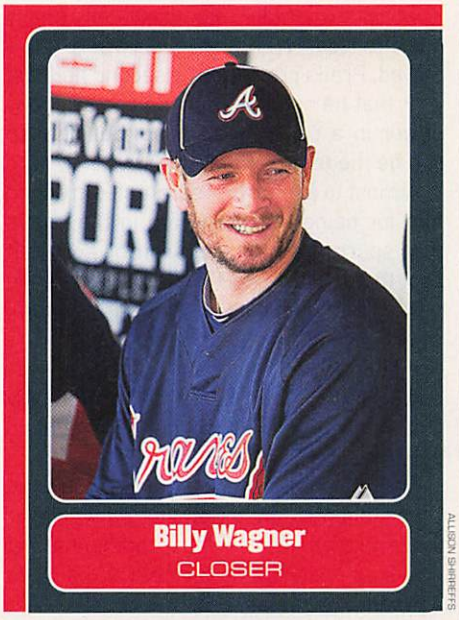
Hudson returned last September, after a year of recovery from elbow surgery, to show the Braves enough promise that he received a new contract and Vazquez was traded. In seven starts, he was 2-1 with a 3.61 ERA. More importantly, the pre-season talk was that the 34-year-old righthander was healthier and throwing better than he had since being acquired from Oakland for the 2005 season. A 20-game winner in 2000, Hudson averaged over 17 wins per year from 2000-03, and he's a two-time AL All-Star. There are those who think he's now capable of being that caliber of starter again.

"I feel like I'm stronger and better than I've been, probably since I've been in Atlanta," Hudson confessed this spring. "I haven't felt this good since my younger days in Oakland."

Kawakami, who was 7-12/3.86 in his first year in America, should be poised to demonstrate why the Braves made him their first Japanese signee and why he was a six-time all-star in Japan who won the Central League's MVP and its equivalent to the Cy Young Award in 2004. A strong competitor, his potential reared its head last year in games such as a 1-0 win over Toronto ace Roy Halladay (now with the Phillies) on May 23 and an 8-2 win at Boston June 19 when he was matched against his much-heralded fellow countryman Dice K (Daisuke Matsuzaka).

RELIEF PITCHING

Good starting pitching often can be wasted without an equally good bullpen to finish games. The Braves appear to have the



makings of one of their best top-to-bottom, front-to-back bullpens in years. That, like everything else, hinges on reasonably good health, but the arms are there.

It all begins at the end with Wagner. The Braves haven't had a closer of such dominating stature and ability since John Smoltz in 2004. Wagner ranks sixth all-time and third among active closers (Trevor Hoffman and Mariano Rivera) with 385 career saves. He only needs six more to pass Hall of Famer Dennis Eckersley for fifth place all-time, and his next target would be John Franco (424), the all-time leader among lefties.

Wagner, a born and bred Southerner, says he's always wanted to play for the Braves and Cox, so he was pleased when free agency gave him the opportunity to sign with Atlanta this past off-season.

At age 38 and coming off elbow surgery in late 2008, Wagner will be considered "suspect" by some until he proves he still has what it takes to slam the door on opponents' last-inning hopes. However, based on how he looked last September, it shouldn't take him long to convince any doubters. In 17 games (two with the Mets and 15 for the Red Sox), he gave up only eight hits in 15 2/3 innings, walking eight and striking out 26 with a 1.72 ERA.

Yes, 26 strikeouts in 15 2/3 innings, which projects to an average of 15 per nine innings. Let the closing begin!

Wagner's primary setup man and the backup closer is Takashi Saito, another free agent signee. Saito, like Wagner, is considered "suspect," because he recently turned 40 years old and had a bit of an off year last season with the Red Sox, mainly due to control issues. Still, the righthander had a 2.43 ERA, allowed fewer hits (50) than innings pitched (55 2/3) and struck out right at one per inning (52).

Most relievers would give anything for a year like that, but it wasn't up to the standard Saito set in his first three years in America (2006-08) when he was a combined 12-7 with 81 saves and a 1.95 ERA for the Dodgers. In those three years, he allowed just 121 hits in 189 2/3 innings and struck out 245.

Next on the pecking order is Peter Moylan, who was nothing short of spectacular last year. Making the team out of spring training was impressive itself because he had elbow surgery on May 8, 2008. But after a bit of a slow start, the Aussie sidewinder, proceeded to set a franchise record by appearing in 87 games en route to a 6-2 record with a 2.84 ERA. Most remarkably, he worked 73 innings without giving up a home run.

Just who will fill the other four bullpen jobs remained to be determined in spring training. In all probability, two of those will belong to Kris Medlen (3-5/4.26 in his rookie year) and lefty Eric O'Flaherty (2-1/3.04 in 78 games, second to Moylan).

That leaves two spots up for grabs among several strong-armed candidates, including Jesse Chavez (1-4/4.01 with Pittsburgh); non-roster invitee Scott Proctor, who didn't pitch last year while recovering from surgery but has 262 games of experience with the Dodgers and Yankees from 2004-08 (16-10/4.42) and reportedly looked primed for a strong return; minor league phenom Craig Kimbrel (103 strikeouts in 60 innings and a

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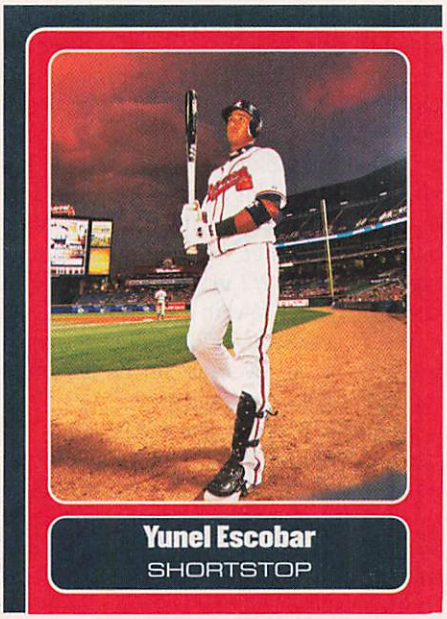


POLIYA DIANAT/ATLANTA BRAVES

.150 batting average allowed at four levels last year); holdover Manny Acosta (1-1/4.34) and lefty Mike Dunn (99 strikeouts in 73 1/3 minor league innings last year), who was acquired from the Yankees in the Vazquez trade.

CATCHER

McCann battled blurry vision last April and hit just .195. He wore glasses the rest of the season, and even though he wasn't completely comfortable in them, hit .281 with 21 home runs and a career-best 94 RBIs, making the NL All-Star team for the fourth time in his fourth full big league season, and winning his third Silver Slugger as the best-hitting catcher in the NL. Still only 26 years old and with all that experience behind him, there's no telling what McCann is capable of this year with surgically repaired vision.

David Ross is entering his second year as the backup catcher, and he's one of the best at the role. He hit .273 last year with seven home runs and 20 RBIs in just 128 at-bats. He's also solid behind the plate and has a strong arm.

FIRST BASE

To a large extent, the Braves' ability to knock the Phillies off the division throne depends on how well Troy Glaus bounces back from a lost season due to injury (shoulder) and learns to play a new position. The career third baseman likely will be counted on to supply much-needed power and fill the cleanup spot in the batting order between Jones and McCann.

It's a lot of responsibility, but the Braves believe Glaus can do the job. After all, he's been a sure-handed infielder (third base) his entire career, he hit 27 home runs with 99 RBIs in 2008, his last full season, and he's just 33 years old. Most importantly, he appeared to be completely healthy in spring training.

When healthy, Glaus has been one of the game's best sluggers. He won the AL home run crown with the Angels in 2000 when he hit a career-high 47. In 10 seasons from 1999-2008, he averaged 30 home runs per year even though injuries cost him full years in 2003 and '04.

Eric Hinske (.242/8/25 in 190 at-bats last year for the Pirates and Yankees) will be the primary backup at first, and Martin Prado showed last years he can fill in at the position, too, if needed.

SECOND BASE

At age 26, Prado's big opportunity finally has arrived. A hitter everywhere he's played, Prado proved in the second half last year that he not only can hit as an everyday player in a big league lineup, but he also can be the team's catalyst.

Almost to a man, his teammates credited him for being the sparkplug in the lineup that spurred the Braves' run at a playoff spot that fell just short in the final week. He hit .307 for the year, second on the team, with 11 home runs and 38 doubles.

Fielding? In 63 games (61 starts) at second base last year, Prado committed only four errors for an excellent .986 fielding percentage.

The main backup at second should be Omar Infante, an excellent utility player that's proven he can fill in adequately at nearly any position on the field and provide a productive bat, as well.

THIRD BASE

The Braves' chances for wining their first division title since 2005 also hinge greatly on Jones' ability to bounce back - at the plate and in the field - from the worst all-around season of his splendid career.

At age 38 (on April 24), he has to show that he's still got it after dropping 100 points from his batting average between 2008 (NL-leading .364) and 2009 (.264), failing to hit 20 home runs (18) for the first time in his 15-year career, finishing with a career-low 71 RBIs, and committing 22 errors (.920 percentage), both last among regular major leaguers at the position.

The good news is he bulked up in the off-season, worked out kinks in his swing, and is determined to help send Cox - the only manager he's ever played for in the majors - out on a high note.

"I feel great physically," Chipper said in spring training. "My upper body is stronger, my mind is fresh, and I'm excited about the season."

Hinske is a backup at third, as are Infante and even Prado, if necessary.

SHORTSTOP

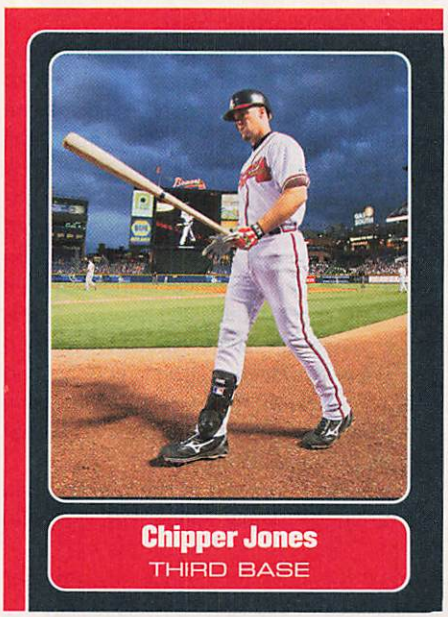
Yunel Escobar continued to grow into one of the best all-around shortstops in the game last year, and at age 27, he should do more of the same in 2010. Capable of making the difficult and even sensational plays in the field, he also became sure-handed on routine plays, fielding .979 with just 13 errors.

At the plate, he provided both consistency (.299) and occasional power (14 home runs and 26 doubles), while also developing into one of the best clutch hitters in the game. He had 76 RBIs, second on the team to McCann, and hit .373 with runners in scoring position.

LEFT FIELD

Matt Diaz and Melky Cabrera could wind up sharing time in left, though just how the outfield is deployed ultimately will hinge on whether or not Jason Heyward makes the club out of spring training. If Heyward is sent to Triple-A Gwinnett, Diaz likely will start in left and Cabrera in right. If Heyward stays in Atlanta, he'll probably get most of the starts in right, and Diaz and Cabrera will share left.

Diaz, 32, has earned plenty of playing time. Other than when he was injured in 2008, he's been one of the club's most consistent hitters since he was acquired in 2006. Last year, he hit .313 to lead the team.



POLIYA DIANAT/ATLANTA BRAVES

In 371 at-bats, he had career highs in home runs (13) and RBIs (58).

He actually made more starts in right field (61) than left field (30) in 2009 and could see plenty of time there again if Heyward goes to the minors.

CENTER FIELD

When the Braves acquired Nate McLouth from Pittsburgh two months into last season, it appeared they'd found a player capable of giving them strong fielding in center, as well as a productive hitter and dependable base stealer. Though McLouth did all of that to some degree, he wasn't quite the player the Braves expected (.256/20/70 with 19 steals). The reason for that became clear after the season when McLouth visited an eye doctor and was fitted for contact lenses.

Now that McLouth can see clearly, the Braves think he could be the player he was in 2008 when he had career highs in nearly every hitting department (.276/26/94 with 46 doubles and 23 steals. He also made the NL All-Star team and won a Gold Glove.

RIGHT FIELD

Will the starter be Heyward, Cabrera or even Diaz? Only Cox knows for sure, and he may not make the decision until he's seen a full spring of Heyward.

Cabrera, only 25 years old, is a versatile outfielder that started more games in center field (97) than any other player for the World Champion Yankees last season. He hit .274 with 13 home runs, 68 RBIs and 10 steals. He also fielded .990, making just three errors in 151 games (130 starts).

Regardless of where Cabrera starts the most, he's likely to see a lot of time at all three outfield positions.

Heyward, naturally, is the wild card, a card Cox may not play until on or just before the April 5 opener at Turner Field against the Cubs. Though he won't turn 21 years old until Aug. 9, Heyward has grown to 6-foot-5, 245 pounds, and his long home runs in batting practice and in a game against Detroit were creating a buzz throughout the Grapefruit League. Last year, he hit a combined .323 with 17 home runs and 63 RBIs in only 362 at-bats at three minor league stops.

If Heyward doesn't make the club, however, Gregor Blanco, who spent most of last year at Triple-A (just 14 games in the majors) after spending most of '08 with Atlanta (137 games), could stick as the fourth outfielder.

- Patty Rasmussen contributed reporting to this story.

BATTER UP!

TAKASHI SAITO

MY FAMILY KNOWS IT'S MY DREAM TO BE HERE

I KNEW THAT THE ATLANTA BRAVES were a competitive team with a lot of rich history, so when I first heard I was going to play for the Braves, I was very happy. I couldn't wait to come here.

I don't really have a preference for the American League or the National League, but I did play in the National League for three years, in the Los Angeles Dodgers organization, before going to Boston. There are more players that I know in the National League, so in that sense I am happy to be returning to the NL.

I've known Kenshin Kawakami for a while, and was glad to learn more about living in Atlanta and about the team from him. It helped make my decision to come to Atlanta even easier.

Bullpen pitchers do have a reputation for being "different." I don't really understand English that well, but I know it's better for us when everyone is in a good mood, and I want to help keep that going. I don't want to turn it off.

I like to have fun and to keep things light with my teammates, but I also know there are times when I have to be serious and I do that.

I don't have any serious superstitions about pitching. I don't need to eat anything special before a game, though if I have several good outings, I might try to eat the same things, but it's not always the case. I wouldn't call myself superstitious.

I'm always expected to be prepared to get in the game as a bullpen pitcher. Looking back at great bullpen pitchers in baseball, I see they approached the game that way, to always be prepared. I've made that my approach. Being ready to pitch when the manager calls on me and being consistent is my number-one job.

> "I'VE KNOWN KENSHIN KAWAKAMI FOR A WHILE... IT HELPED MAKE MY DECISION TO COME TO ATLANTA EVEN EASIER."

This season I might not always know if I will be in the seventh or eighth inning or even the ninth inning, and perhaps the number of innings I will be expected to pitch. I can throw one or two innings, whatever I am asked to do.

There are many small differences here and there between American baseball and Japanese baseball that I have noticed over the years, but if I start going into that, it's really too many to list! But both American and Japanese baseball are very exciting games, exciting places to play.

I've been fortunate to get to play in both leagues. I wouldn't choose one over the other, but playing in America was my dream.

My family, wife, Yukiko, and our daughters, Kurumi, Mokoka and Airi, live at our home in Yokohama, Japan, during most of the baseball season. Because the Japanese school schedule is different from the U.S. schedule, they have to remain there. After they visit for a couple of weeks during spring training they go back to Japan so my oldest daughters can go to school. Then they will visit Atlanta one month during the season.

It is a long time to be away from my family, and I miss them very much. But they understand that this is my dream, to be a pitcher in the American major leagues and especially with the Atlanta Braves. I talk with them on the phone all the time, and I also have online video chats with them.

Because I spend so much time away from them during the baseball season, I spend all of my off-season with my family. I relax with them by spending time with them, doing things with them. During the season, I like to go spas and enjoy the sauna and different baths, hot, cold. I rest a lot, as well.

I like to do karaoke, too! Usually when I like to relax, I will sing Japanese songs, but sometimes I will sing American songs by Billy Joel or bands like The Beatles.

THE GREAT CHASE

CAN ANYONE HEAD OFF PHILLIES' QUEST TO BE FIRST TO WIN THREE STRAIGHT NL PENNANTS IN 66 YEARS?

The National League in 2010 boils down to a simple question: Can anyone beat the Phillies?

Ten different teams won NL titles in a 12-year span from 1997 to 2008. The Phillies are the first club to win back-to-back league championships since the '95-'96 Braves.

The last team to win three straight: The '42-44 Cardinals.

Yet, the additions of righthander Roy Halladay and third baseman Placido Polanco could make the Phillies even stronger - at least on paper - than they were last season.

Halladay is not much of an upgrade from the pitcher he replaced, lefthander Cliff Lee, but the Phillies only had Lee for the final two months of last season and the post-season. They will have Halladay for at least the next four years.

Not that the league – or even the NL East – will be a walkover.

The Marlins believe they are ready to win. The Braves are intent on giving Bobby Cox a fitting sendoff. The Dodgers, Rockies and Cardinals – all playoff teams last season – should again prove worthy contenders.

The enduring lesson of baseball is that little is predictable. The Phillies could stumble in any number of ways. Perhaps even a surprise team could emerge. But seasons rarely turn out the way most people expect.

Here is a look at how the league could break down, along with capsules of the Braves' inter-league opponents and their predicted finish in the American League.

NL EAST

1 | PHILLIES (1ST, 93-69)

MANAGER: Charlie Manuel (6th year)

KEY ADDITIONS: Roy Halladay, RHP; Placido Polanco, 3B.

KEY LOSSES: Cliff Lee, LHP; Pedro Feliz, 3B.

BIG STICK: Ryan Howard, 1B (.279, 45 homers, 141 RBIs). Howard, set to earn $19 million in 2010 and $20 million in '11, could be traded at season's end if the Phillies want to re-sign rightfielder Jayson Werth.

ACE: Halladay, RHP (17-10, 2.79 ERA for Blue Jays). Halladay is moving to a hitter-friendly park, but also will be backed by the Phillies' offense. He could be as dominant in the National League as CC Sabathia was with the Brewers.

BOXSCORE: Virtually everyone in baseball considers the Phillies the team to beat in the NL. General manager Ruben Amaro Jr. traded Lee for prospects rather than keep Halladay and Lee for an incredible top of the rotation – a decision that will be scrutinized all season. Something else worth monitoring: The ability of closer Brad Lidge to rebound from a horrible year.

GETTY IMAGES/NICK LAHAM

LINESCORE: Amaro, in addition to adding Halladay, improved the bench by signing IF Juan Castro, 1B Ross Gload and C Brian Schneider and the bullpen by signing RHPs Danys Baez and Jose Contreras.

2 | MARLINS (87-75, 2ND)

MANAGER: Fredi Gonzalez (4th year)

KEY ADDITIONS: None.

KEY LOSSES: Nick Johnson, 1B.

BIG STICK: Hanley Ramirez, SS (.342, 24 homers, 106 RBIs). Ramirez, the best player in the league, non-Pujols division,

reported to spring training even more determined to lead the Marlins to the next level. Not only did he win the batting title last season, but his .410 on-base percentage also was a career-high.

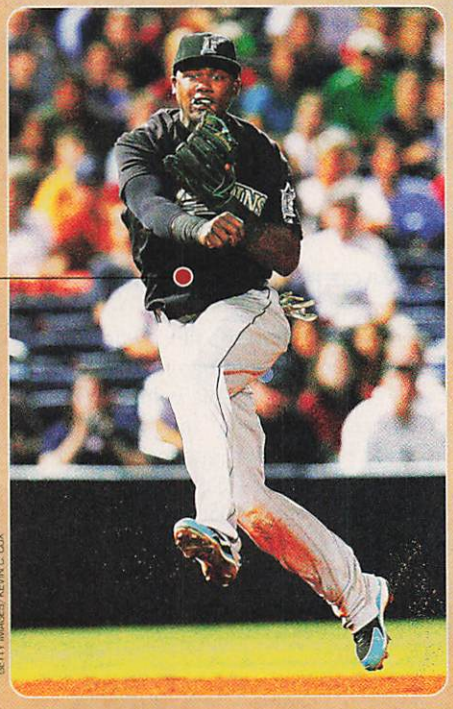
ACE: Josh Johnson, RHP (15-5, 3.23 ERA last season). If not for the four-year, $39 million contract that Johnson signed during the off-season, he likely would be the game's No. 1 trade target. Johnson, 26, showed signs of fatigue last season, but will be one more year removed from Tommy John surgery.

BOXSCORE: The Marlins' offense again will be strong, but their rotation behind Johnson and RHP Ricky Nolasco is the team's biggest question. New pitching coach Randy St. Claire, previously with the Nationals, needs to find answers from a group that includes RHPs Chris Volstad, Anibal Sanchez, Rick VandenHurk and LHP Andrew Miller.

LINESCORE: The pressure is on Gonzalez, who remained manager only after owner Jeffrey Loria had a reported flirtation with Bobby Valentine at the end of last season. Loria said at the start of spring training, "I expect us to make the playoffs. We've got all the ammunition we need."

3 | BRAVES (3RD, 86-76)

MANAGER: Bobby Cox (25th year).



GETTY IMAGES/ KEVIN C. COX

KEY ADDITIONS: Billy Wagner, LHP; Takashi Saito, RHP; Troy Glaus, 1B.

KEY LOSSES: Javier Vazquez, RHP; Rafael Soriano, RHP; Mike Gonzalez, LHP.

BIG STICK: Chipper Jones (.264, 18 homers, 71 RBIs). One of the Braves' central beliefs is that Jones will rebound from last season, when he produced the lowest home-run total in his 16-year career.

ACE: Jair Jurrjens, RHP (14-10, 2.60 ERA last season). RHP Tim Hudson could reclaim ace status, or perhaps RHP Tommy Hanson will ascend to that level. But it was Jurrjens who was third in the NL in ERA last season.

BOXSCORE: The Braves, in Cox's final season, are hell-bent on making their first post-season appearance since 2005. The biggest question is whether the team's new age/injury risks – Wagner, Saito, Glaus – will prove to be worthwhile. Offensive improvement is expected from most of the regulars, but Glaus is needed to be a middle-of-the-order threat.

LINESCORE: RF Jason Heyward, the game's consensus No. 1 prospect, could be the perfect farewell gift for Cox. Scouts love Heyward's potential, and it's not a stretch to say that he could be a difference-maker as a rookie.

4 | METS (4TH, 70-92)

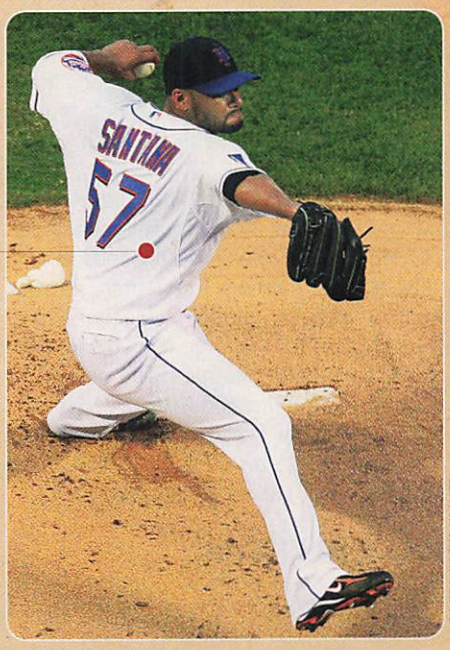
MANAGER: Jerry Manuel (2nd full year).

KEY ADDITION: Jason Bay, LF.

KEY LOSS: Carlos Delgado, 1B.

BIG STICK: David Wright, 3B (.307, 10 homers, 72 RBIs). Wright, in the Mets' inaugural season at Citi Field, produced the same .390 on-base percentage that he had in the final year at Shea, but his home-run total dropped from 33 to 10, and his RBI total fell from 124 to 72. Looking to regain power, he reported to spring training with a more muscular, defined physique.

ACE: Johan Santana, LHP (13-9, 3.13 ERA). Coming off surgery to remove bone chips from his elbow, Santana is expected to be healthy – and his usual masterful self. The Mets need five of him. Unfortunately, there is just one.



GETTY IMAGES/ JIM MCISAAC

BOXSCORE: The Mets' party line is that their players simply need to return to health, but that will not happen easily - CF Carlos Beltran will miss the start of the season after undergoing knee surgery, and SS Jose Reyes had to deal with a hyperactive thyroid early in spring training. Bay will help the offense, but the team will be haunted by its failure to address the rotation beyond Santana and add a setup man in front of closer Francisco Rodriguez.

LINESCORE: A poor start could doom both general manager Omar Minaya and manager Jerry Manuel.

5 | NATIONALS (59-103, 5TH)

MANAGER: Jim Riggleman (1st full season)

KEY ADDITIONS: RHP Jason Marquis, C Ivan Rodriguez, RH closer Matt Capps.

KEY LOSSES: RHP Mike MacDougal.

BIG STICK: Adam Dunn, 1B (.267, 38 homers, 105 RBIs). His streak of five straight 40-homer seasons ended last season; Dunn finished with 38. Free-agent riches await next off-season if he can become an adequate fielder at first. AL teams will want him regardless, and the Nats plan to offer Dunn an extension.

ACE: John Lannan, LHP (9-13, 3.88 last

season). Lannan actually is more of a mid-rotation starter, as is Marquis, whom the Nationals signed to be their nominal ace. The eventual will be righthander Stephen Strasburg, the No. 1 pick in last year's draft. Strasburg figures to make his major-league debut sometime this season.

BOXSCORE: Slowly but surely, the Nationals are becoming more respectable. GM Mike Rizzo spent the off-season in a near-frenzy, naming Riggleman permanent manager, adding Marquis and Rodriguez in free agency, thoroughly reconstructing the bullpen. The best is yet to come: Strasburg and RHP Drew Storen, the team's other first-round pick last season, are not far away, and the Nats also hold the No. 1 choice in this year's draft.

NL CENTRAL

1 | CARDINALS (91-71, 1ST)

MANAGER: Tony La Russa (15th year)

The Yankees talk about their "Core Four" of Derek Jeter, Mariano Rivera, Jorge Posada and Andy Pettitte, but the Cardinals boast an even better quartet – first baseman **Albert Pujols**, leftfielder Matt Holliday and righthanders Chris Carpenter and Adam Wainwright. That group alone makes St. Louis the division favorite, but the bullpen is a significant question.

2 | CUBS (83-78, 2ND)

MANAGER: Lou Piniella (4th year)

Everything that could go wrong went wrong last season, and the Cubs still were tied for first place as late as Aug. 7. The team's health should improve this season. New ownership will allow greater flexibility for in-season moves. Milton Bradley is gone, and two other outfielders, Marlon Byrd and Xavier Nady, have arrived. Okay, but the rotation depth could be an issue, and the Cubs were still scrambling to find a setup man for Carlos Marmol.

3 | REDS (78-84, 4TH)

MANAGER: Dusty Baker (3rd year)

The Reds could be poised for a minor breakthrough. Their pitching staff is deep, and could get deeper with lefthander Aroldis Chapman, a Cuban defector the Reds signed for $30 million. The left side of the infield should be more stable with the addition of shortstop Orlando Cabrera and the presence of third baseman Scott Rolen for a full season.

4 | BREWERS (80-82, 3RD)

MANAGER: Ken Macha (2nd year)

Starting pitching was the team's downfall last season. The Brewers ranked third in the NL in runs, but their 5.37 rotation ERA was by far the worst in the league. Free-agent lefthanders Randy Wolf and Doug Davis should help, and the team also signed righthander LaTroy Hawkins to fortify the bullpen.

5 | ASTROS (74-88, 5TH)

MANAGER: Brad Mills (1st year)

Mills alone will help. The players held his predecessor, Cecil Cooper, in low regard. Still, the Astros' makeover consists of unspectacular veteran additions (reliever Brandon Lyon, starter Brett Myers, third baseman Pedro Feliz) and the promotion of a questionable young shortstop (Tommy Manzella). Any team with Roy Oswalt and Wandy Rodriguez heading its rotation cannot be dismissed, but the Astros are a win-now team with not enough to win.

6 | PIRATES (62-99, 6TH)

MANAGER: John Russell (3rd year)

There are some pieces to like – centerfielder Andrew McCutchen, lefthander Paul Maholm, maybe first baseman Garrett Jones, assuming his 2009 breakthrough was not a fluke. There also are some exciting pieces coming - third baseman Pedro Alvarez, righthander Brad Lincoln, outfielder Jose Tabata. Still, the Pirates' biggest free-agent addition was reliever Octavio Dotel, and their 18th consecutive losing season is inevitable.

NL WEST

1 | ROCKIES (92-70, 2ND)

MANAGER: Jim Tracy (1st full season)

The Rockies seem to play best as the hunter instead of the hunted, but their talent should be good enough to render the distinction irrelevant. The roster is essentially the same as it was last season. Jeff Francis, coming off shoulder surgery, will replace Jason Marquis in the rotation, and Melvin Mora will replace Garrett Atkins as a backup infielder.

GETTY IMAGES/STEPHEN DUNN

2 | DODGERS (1ST, 95-67)

MANAGER: Joe Torre (3rd year)

The real story is off the field, where owner Frank McCourt continues his nasty – and costly - divorce from his wife, Jamie. The obvious restrictions on the team's finances led to an off-season in which the Dodgers' most significant free-agent signing was righthander Vicente Padilla. Still, the team features plenty of star-quality young talent. Leftfielder **Manny Ramirez** is playing for his next contract, which could be either a good or bad thing.

3 | GIANTS (88-74, 3RD)

MANAGER: Bruce Bochy (4th year)

Love the pitching, hate the hitting. The Giants had a chance during the off-season to find high-impact help for Tim Lincecum, Matt Cain & Co., but instead settled for a series of just-okay, 30-somethings – utility-man Mark DeRosa, first baseman Aubrey Huff, a return engagement with catcher Bengie Molina. The question remains: Who the heck is going to hit?

4 | DIAMONDBACKS (70-92, 5TH)

MANAGER: A.J. Hinch (1st full season)

Potential sleeper. So much depends on the health of righthander Brandon Webb, who is coming off shoulder surgery. If Webb can return to form, the Diamondbacks' top three starters of Dan Haren, Webb and Edwin Jackson will be as good as any in a pitching-rich division. The offense should improve with the additions of former Braves first baseman Adam LaRoche and second baseman Kelly Johnson.

5 | PADRES (75-87, 4TH)

MANAGER: Bud Black (4th year)

Their 37-25 finish was nice, but the Padres are not likely to build on it. Righthander Jake Peavy is gone – the team actually got hot after he left – and first baseman Adrian Gonzalez soon will follow. New general manager Jed Hoyer made some decent off-season moves, signing righthander Jon Garland and utilityman Jerry Hairston and re-acquiring Hairston's brother, outfielder Scott Hairston. The biggest move – the trade of Gonzalez – figures to come in July.

INTER-LEAGUE OPPONENT

1 | TWINS (87-76, 1ST AL CENTRAL)

MANAGER: Ron Gardenhire (9th year)

The Twins' payroll, believe it or not, will be nearly $100 million, thanks in large part to the anticipated revenue from the opening of Target Field. The improvements should be noticeable. The new doubleplay combination of second baseman Orlando Hudson and shortstop J.J. Hardy is an upgrade, the re-signing of righthander Carl Pavano solidifies the rotation, and the addition of Jim Thome greatly helps the bench. However, the apparent spring loss of closer Joe Nathan looms large.

2 | WHITE SOX (79-83, 3RD AL CENTRAL)

MANAGER: Ozzie Guillen (7th year)

Their rotation - Jake Peavy, Mark Buerhle, John Danks, Gavin Floyd and Freddy Garcia - could be among the game's best. The addition of outfielder Juan Pierre will enable Guillen to play more of his cherished small ball.

3 | RAYS (84-78, 3RD AL EAST)

MANAGER: Joe Maddon (5th year)

This is it for the Rays - boom or bust. The addition of former Braves closer Rafael Soriano pushed the payroll past $70 million, and owner Stuart Sternberg says the number will drop below $60 million in 2011. Leftfielder Carl Crawford and first baseman Carlos Pena, both potential free agents, could be traded if the Rays stumble. The team, however, expects to contend, and improvements from centerfielder B.J. Upton and catcher Dioner Navarro would help make that happen.

3 | TIGERS (86-77, 2ND AL CENTRAL)

MANAGER: Jim Leyland (5th year)

Their off-season began with the trades of centerfielder Curtis Granderson and righthander Edwin Jackson, which were widely interpreted as cost-cutting moves. The Tigers, however, wound up signing closer Jose Valverde and outfielder Johnny Damon. Strong returns by two pitchers, right-handed starter Jeremy Bonderman and reliever Joel Zumaya, could make a huge difference.

4 | ROYALS (68-97, TIED FOR 4TH AL CENTRAL)

MANAGER: Trey Hillman (3rd season)

Not a lot to recommend here. Reigning Cy Young winner Zack Greinke, closer Joakim Soria and first baseman Billy Butler form an excellent young core, but the Royals need more around them.

- KEN ROSENTHAL IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR FOXSPORTS.COM

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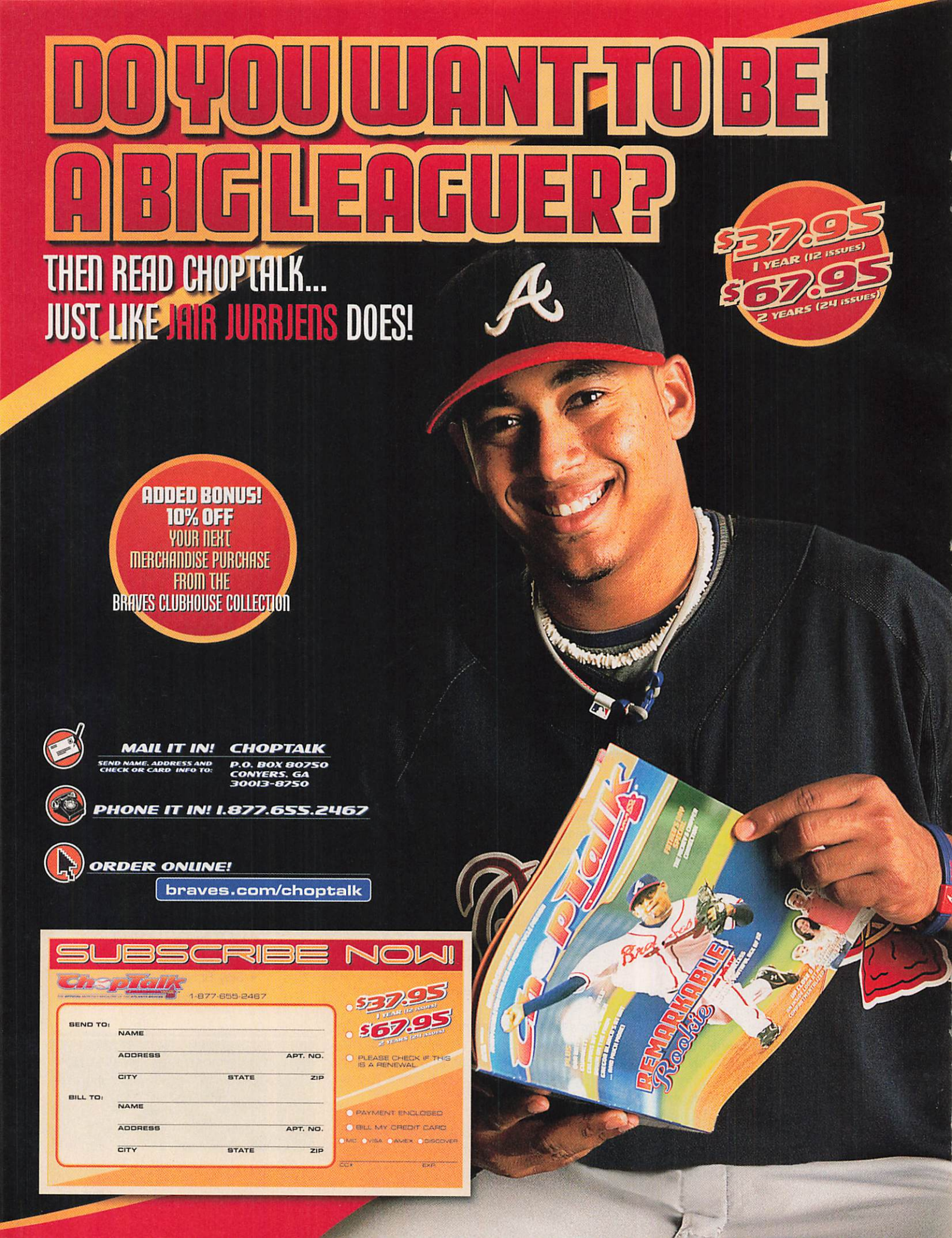

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PURSUING THE ELUSIVE NO-HITTER

BY STEVE FALL

DESPITE ALL their great starting pitchers, the Braves have had only three no-hitters since moving to Atlanta in 1966.

Major league pitchers have recorded 106 no-hitters in these 44 seasons. Among the 20 teams that existed for that entire time frame, only the Mets (zero) and Tigers (two) have pitched fewer no-hitters than the Braves.

The Braves' limited number of no-hitters is unusual but not record setting. Neither the Mets nor the Padres have *ever* had a pitcher throw a no-hitter, and they became National League expansion teams in 1962 and 1969, respectively.

What makes the Braves' trend unusual is who threw their two no-hitters since Hall of Famer Phil Niekro had the first one on Aug. 5, 1973.

Kent Mercker made just 54 starts with Atlanta, but still pitched two of them. His first was a combined no-hitter versus San Diego on September 11, 1991, which came in just his third career start. The lefty worked the first six innings before Mark Wohlers delivered two hitless innings and Alejandro Pena shut down the Padres in the ninth. Mercker then threw a complete game no-hitter on April 8, 1994, at Los Angeles. He only pitched one other complete game his entire career.

Despite their collective brilliance, Tom Glavine, Greg Maddux and John Smoltz never pitched a no-hitter. They had plenty of opportunities, because that trio combined for 1,347 career starts for Atlanta. Glavine gave up hits more often than most elite pitchers. With the Braves, he allowed 8.6 hits per nine innings. Maddux (8.1) and Smoltz (7.9) had better hits allowed per nine innings figures, which made them more likely to throw a no-hitter.

While Mercker's statistics fall well short of those three aces, he excelled at limiting hits early in his career. He surrendered just 7.7 hits per nine innings in a Braves uniform. That led all the team's pitchers who made at least 50 starts since 1966.

The Braves haven't had many near no-hitters in recent history either. Smoltz threw eight and a third no-hit innings against the Phillies on May 27, 1990. But Lenny Dykstra doubled to end his bid, and Smoltz settled for a two-hitter. No Brave has had a no-hitter broken up in the ninth inning since then.

ATLANTA BRAVES

Kent Mercker won only 31 games for the Braves, but remarkably, two of those - one with help - were no-hitters.

Atlanta owns four complete game one-hitters in the past two decades: Smoltz, Maddux, Tim Hudson and Kevin Millwood each had one. While not a complete game, Glavine combined with Wohlers for one of just five one-hitters in World Series history to clinch the team's 1995 World Championship in Game 6.

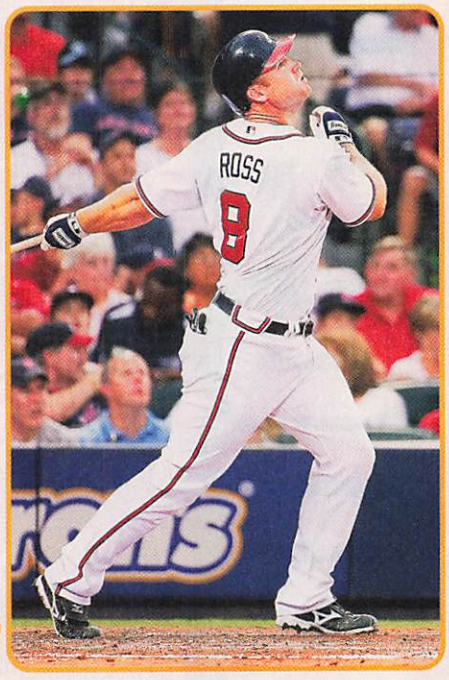
No-hitters usually require some good luck along with skill. Braves pitchers apparently haven't had much luck in this area, except for Mercker.

If a situation comes up where the Braves desperately need a home run, David Ross is a good man to have at the plate. Ross hit 7 home runs last year in just 151 plate appearances, which projects to 27.8 home runs over 600 plate appearances. That led all his current teammates that had at least 100 plate appearances. Few people noticed, because the backup catcher saw limited action. Brian McCann came next in this category at 22.9, followed by Eric Hinske (21.4) and Nate McLouth (20.3).

Ross' home run frequency wasn't just a one-year thing. He has sustained a high rate throughout his career, with 27.6 home runs per 600 plate appearances. He enters 2010 with 67 career homers in 1,458 plate appearances. Only one player in major league history hit more home runs in fewer than 1,500 plate appearances: Carlos Quentin (71). In 2006, when Ross played for the Reds, he became the seventh major leaguer to hit 20 home runs in less than 300 plate appearances.

Matt Diaz also has impressive hitting stats in limited playing time. In addition to batting .313 with an outstanding .390 on-base percentage last year, Diaz produced 18.4 home runs and 81.9 RBIs per 600 plate appearances. Among current teammates with at least 100 plate appearances in 2009, only McCann drove in more runs per 600 plate appearances (102.4).

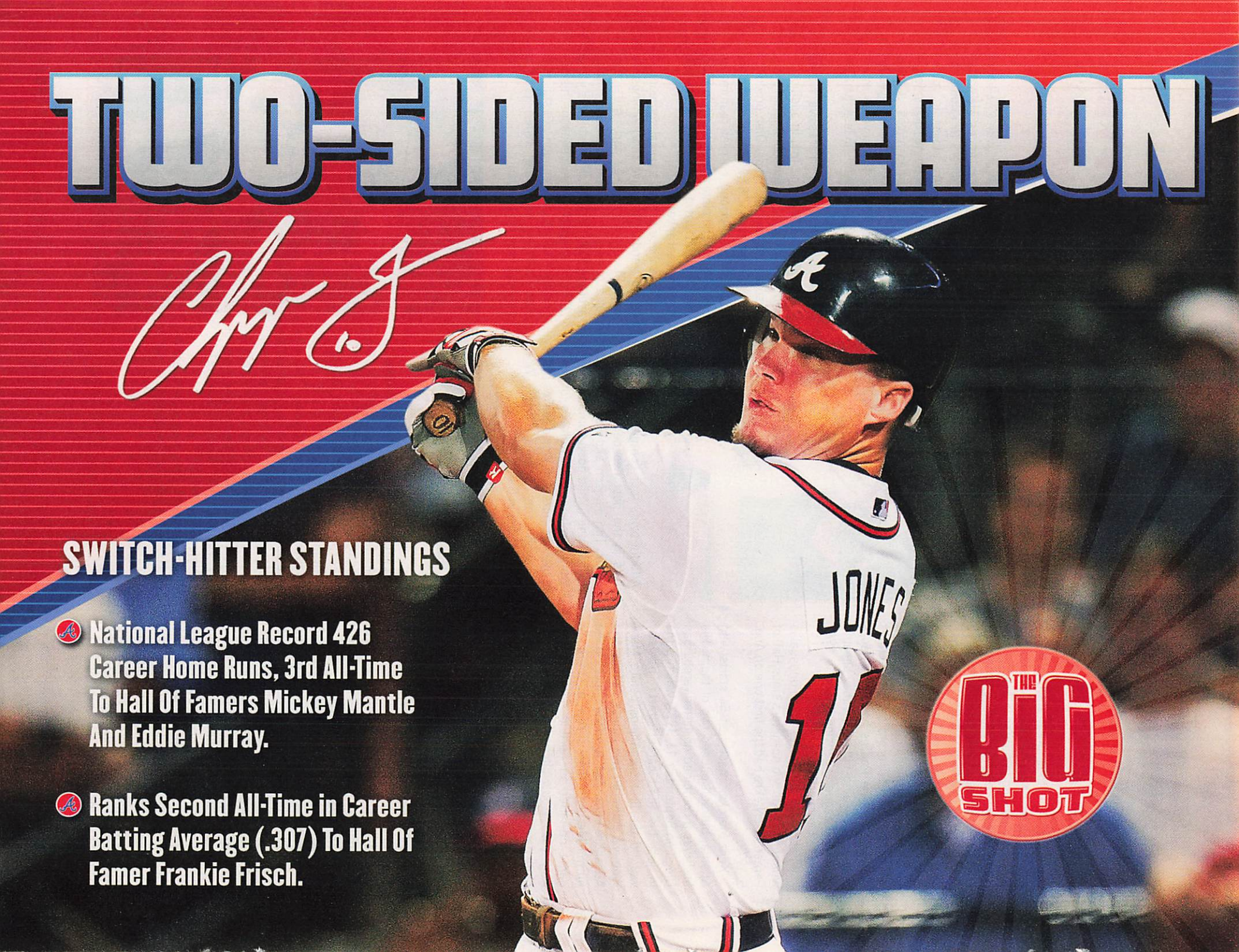
While these statistics reveal some interesting trends, they have shortcomings, as well. Players usually see part-time action for a reason. While he had a solid batting average (.273) in 2009, Ross still has just a .228 career figure. In most seasons, his hitting hasn't been good enough to justify regular at-bats, especially when playing behind a star like McCann.



POUYA DIANAT/ATLANTA BRAVES

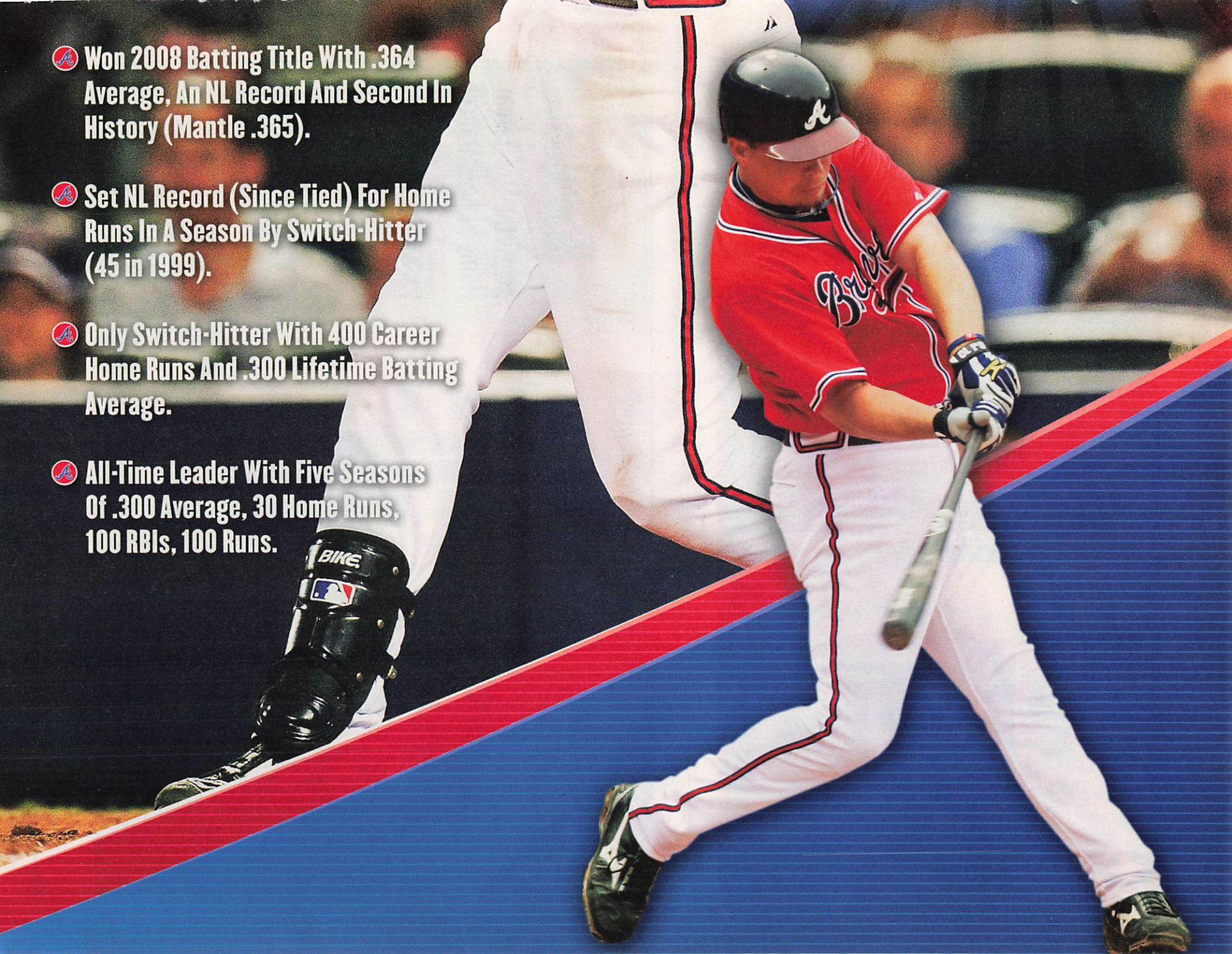
No one else on the Braves hit home runs as frequently as backup catcher David Ross did last year.

TWO-SIDED WEAPON



SWITCH-HITTER STANDINGS

- National League Record 426 Career Home Runs, 3rd All-Time To Hall Of Famers Mickey Mantle And Eddie Murray.
- Ranks Second All-Time in Career Batting Average (.307) To Hall Of Famer Frankie Frisch.


Won 2008 Batting Title With .364 Average, An NL Record And Second In History (Mantle .365).
Set NL Record (Since Tied) For Home Runs In A Season By Switch-Hitter (45 in 1999).
Only Switch-Hitter With 400 Career Home Runs And .300 Lifetime Batting Average.
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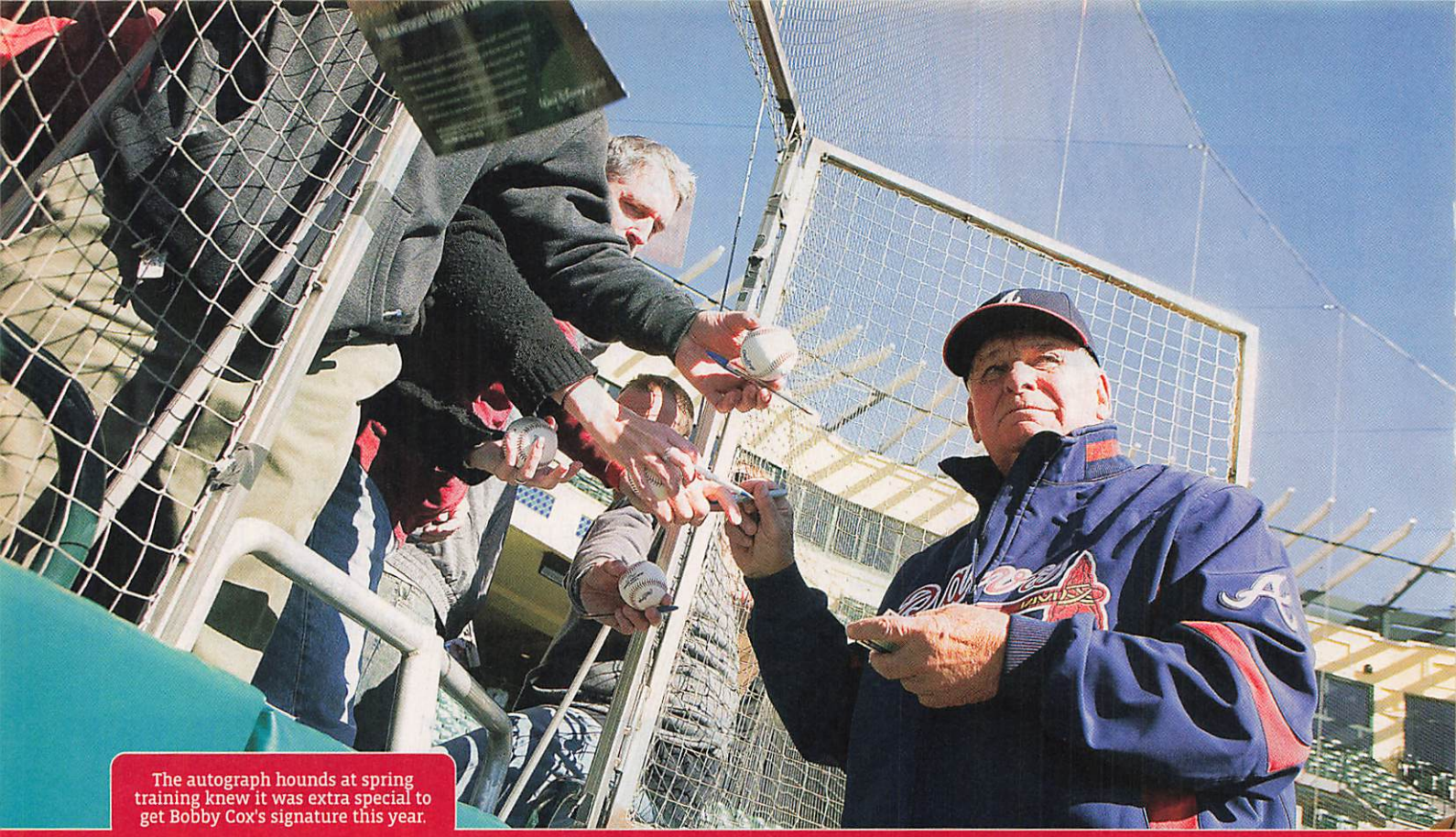


The autograph hounds at spring training knew it was extra special to get Bobby Cox's signature this year.

ALLISON SHIRREFFS

FOCUSED

More Than Ever, It's One For All - And All For One - In Bobby Cox's Last Go-Round

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

TO A MAN, players describe Bobby Cox as a "player's manager," the kind of manager who, in addition to understanding the game, understands how to lead people. He encourages, leads through positive reinforcement, gives respect, and earns it in return. Cox is intensely loyal to his players, and they give back that same loyalty.

"He's really passionate about the game and his players," said Tim Hudson. "He knows the game, and he's really old school. I love it. He gets to the field three hours before everybody. I don't care what time you get here, he's in full 'uni' with his spikes on. He's a throwback from way back when, and it's fun to see."

THIRD IN A SERIES

#6 THE FINAL SEASON

Hudson's feelings seem to be echoed by every player in the clubhouse. They all began to generate a common focus last September when Cox announced his intention to retire as manager after 2010. The players knew they wanted to send him out on a high note.

But will they be "playing up" this year, so to speak? Somehow trying harder for their manager? And if so, does that mean they weren't playing as hard as possible in the past?

"It sounds bad to say it that way, like the previous three or four years you haven't been playing hard," said new closer Billy Wagner, who confessed he's wanted to play for Cox for years. "I don't think that you're trying any harder. It's just a little more awareness, the foresight that you know (retirement) is going to happen. This is it for Bobby, so you want to have your best season."

"I think we all play hard anyway, but from the sentimental part of it, we want to win, and we want to win it for him," added Hudson. "The bottom line is that he's our teammate. He's going to be behind us, no matter what. As a player, you love that. It really is difficult to believe that a year from now he won't be here."

If the notion that by next April a new manager will be in the Braves' dugout is incomprehensible, imagine how it feels to be Chipper Jones, the player with the longest tenure under Cox. Jones was drafted out of high school in June 1990 by then Braves general manager Bobby Cox. He came up through the minor league organization that was overhauled by Cox, coached and managed by a staff influenced by Cox, essentially schooled in professional baseball by Cox. He has never played for another major league manager. Jones has also sat through 17 spring training pep talks from Cox.

"I could give that speech," said Jones with a laugh. "I know that somewhere in the speech he'll say something to the effect that we have the team to win the World Series."

But this year in Orlando, the speech took on a different tone when not only players, but also the coaches, trainers, and front office personnel gathered 'round to hear the speech one last time. Jones said he could tell Cox was nervous.

"He thanked the players, the coaches, the people who helped him," said Jones. "There was definitely emotion there. But he also talked about how excited he was."

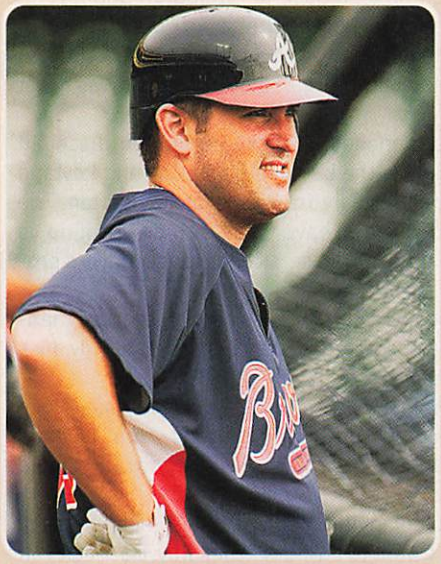
And true to form, Cox added that he believes the team assembled before him has what it takes to play for a championship in October.

"Classic Bobby," said Jones.

Even newcomers to the Braves understand the significance of this season. But new first baseman Troy Glaus is adamant that if a player needs the manager to be in his last year in order to play to win, he's in the wrong place!

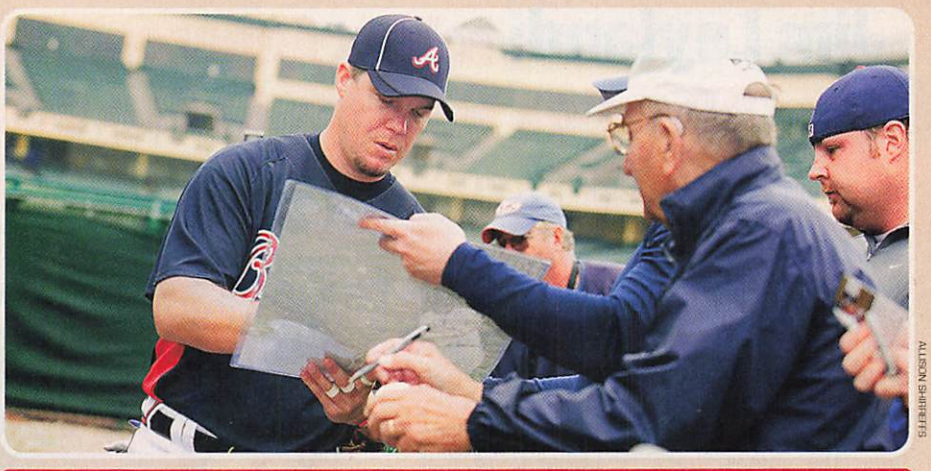
"You certainly want to send Bobby out on a good note - everyone in here wants to do that," Glaus said. "But I don't think that brings with it any more incentive to make you play harder or better. If you need the manager to be in his last year, I don't think I want you around here! The incentive is to play hard and win as many games as possible... Oh, and coincidentally, it's Bobby's last year."

Glaus' comments accurately reflect Cox's feelings on the subject.



ALLISON SHERIFFS

This is the first year for Troy Glaus to play under Cox, but he understands the significance the Braves are placing on having a successful season.



ALLISON SHERIFFS

Chipper Jones was drafted when Cox was general manager, came up through a farm system shaped by Cox, and has never played for any other manager in the majors except Cox.

"It's nice for people to think that way, and I understand the intention," said Cox, almost embarrassed. "But Matt Diaz said it best when he said that I wouldn't want people to 'play up' in my last year, because that's how I want them playing all the time."

In fact, Diaz said "playing up" would be a contradiction.

"If, all of a sudden, I say I'm going to play all out this year because it's his last year, I'm going against everything he's taught me for the last four years," said Diaz. "He taught me that every day matters."

Jair Jurrjens compared the respect he has for Cox to the respect he has for his father. "It's like your dad leaving you," he said. "You want to make sure you leave everything on the field. I think people will sacrifice more and try to play more team-wise than personal. They'll do anything possible to win one game, play every game like it's the last game of the season."

Comments like Jurrjens' don't surprise Stan Kasten. From the inside, as Braves president from 1986 until 2003, and now from the outside as president of the Washington Nationals, Kasten watched and admired Cox's managerial skills. He doesn't buy the idea that the Braves will "play up" for Cox just because of his retirement.

"I think the players will 'play up' - but they always do for Bobby," said Kasten. "I don't think his teams underachieve. They always achieve their maximum. And they do it because he brings it out of them."

Jones called Cox's retirement an "emotional component" to his normal motivation.

"It is out of respect for what Bobby's done for each of us," said Jones, "that we say the right things and go about our business with the underlying tone that this is Bobby's last year, and we want to make it a special one for him. Less 'playing up,' and more playing the way he taught us to play. This team will have a little bit of everything that reflects on Bobby."

"Everything I do will have Bobby in the back of my mind." – Chipper Jones

The veterans on the team have made it clear that Cox's final season managing is special, and Jones intends to make sure that message is communicated loud and clear in the players-only team meeting prior to the beginning of the season.

"I will put (my feelings) in the context of what he means to me, speaking from my personal experiences," said Jones. "This man means a lot to me, and I'm going to go out and bust my tail this year... not that I don't every year. But everything I do will have Bobby in the back of my mind. And if I don't think you're doing it like me, you're going to hear about it."

"The players that are here in Atlanta for the first time will see, if they haven't already, that he's a special guy that you want to play hard for," said Hudson. "It's going to be a fun year. Bobby picked a great club to go out on. Whoever comes in behind him will have some tough shoes to fill. I just hope whoever replaces him reads his 'How To Manage' manual!"

NEXT MONTH: PART FOUR.

Jim Leyland: It Was Apparent As Far Back As 1982 That Cox Was One Of The Best Managers

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

JIM LEYLAND counts himself as one of Bobby Cox's many admirers in the game, and that's been the case since 1982, when he was a first-year coach on the Chicago White Sox staff under manager, Tony La Russa, now with St. Louis.

"Tony and I would spend a lot of time talking after the games," recalled Leyland. "At that time, Bobby was the manager at Toronto (1982 was his first season with the Blue Jays after being fired from the Braves in 1981), and in those days, everybody was talking about (future Hall of Famers) Earl Weaver (at Baltimore), Sparky Anderson (then with Detroit) - and rightfully so. But we talked a lot about how impressive Bobby Cox was. We picked out Bobby Cox as one of the outstanding managers at the time, and that proved to be right."

Leyland's regard for Cox has as much to do with how he's won games as with the number of games he's won.

"A lot of people thought that the Braves were the same every year," he said. "But the Braves changed a lot of position players. Their one constant was outstanding pitching, but the Braves changed as much as anybody."

BRAVES MUSEUM AND HALL OF FAME

Cox and Jim Leyland (R) opposed each other in the 1991 and '92 NLCS, with the Braves winning both, but Leyland's Marlins beat Atlanta in the '97 NLCS.

Leyland said it was obvious that the players knew who ran the show in Atlanta, and they bought into it.

"Everyone knew how it was going to be, and that set a good tone," he said. "Bobby ran it right, too. He had a great deal of respect for the players, and he got respect in return."

Jair Jurrjens describes himself as "lucky" for making his major league debut with the Tigers under Leyland's leadership in 2007, and then having the good fortune to be traded to Atlanta to continue his career under Cox's guidance the next season.

"He and Leyland are old school," said Jurrjens. "It's really easy to go up and talk to them, but I don't usually do it. I have a lot of respect for them."

STORIES OF BOBBY

Cox and Leyland are frequent foes that have met in three of the most-exciting National League Championship Series on record. Those took place in 1991 and 1992 when Leyland was manager of the Pittsburgh Pirates, and in 1997 when Leyland was with the Florida Marlins. Their record against each other in those series is dead even, 10-10. In '91 and '92, the Braves won four games each series to the Pirates' three. And in 1997, the Braves won two games to the Marlins' four.

Leyland fondly recalls the excitement of the NLCS matchups with the Braves, especially the Pittsburgh series in 1991 and '92, calling them "some of the greatest games I've ever been involved in."

"I don't think anyone will ever forget the last game of the 1992 series, when Sid (Bream) slid," said Leyland, who's beginning his 19th season as a major league manager, his fifth with Detroit. "They show it on television all the time! But I remember in 1991 we took a 3-2 game lead back to Pittsburgh and (Steve) Avery (1-0 win in Game 6) and (John) Smoltz (4-0 win in Game 7) pitched two of the greatest games I've ever seen pitched, not just in the post-season, but any time. We had no chance. It was great baseball."

The phrase "player's manager" is tossed around in baseball almost as much as the ball itself, and Cox and Leyland are two men who are frequently given that tag. The esteem players have for Cox and Leyland is more than just lip service, because players produce results for them.

The only plus to Cox's departure from managing, according to Leyland, is the way he's going about it.

"This was Bobby's choice, which is nice, since they usually kick us out!" said Leyland. And Leyland scoffs at any notion that Cox's managerial approach would change this year.

"Bobby's not going to do anything different this year," he said. "He's a pro and wouldn't want to do it any other way. Baseball will miss him being in the dugout. There's no question about that. It's been an honor, and I mean that... It's been an honor to manage against him."

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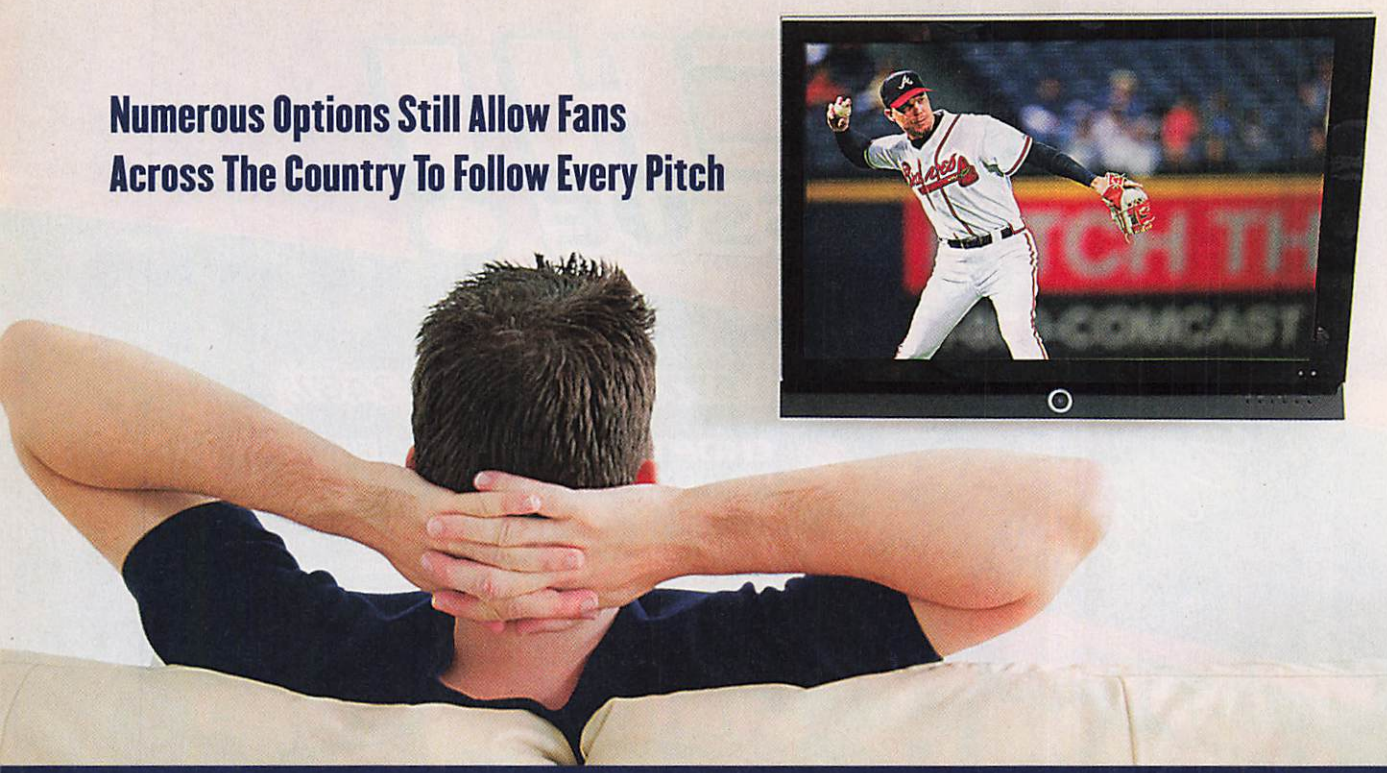
October 2005	Andruw Jones
November 2005	Brian McCann
December 2005	Andruw Jones
January 2006	Edgar Renteria
February 2006	Niekro, Aaron, Lemaster
March 2006	LaRoche Family
April 2006	Andruw, Smoltz, Chipper
May 2006	Chris Reitsma
June 2006	Francoeur's Slam
July 2006	Edgar Renteria
August 2006	Brian McCann
September 2006	Bob Wickman
October 2006	John Smoltz
November 2006	Bobby Cox
December 2006	Jeff Francoeur
January 2007	Rafael Soriano
February 2007	Spring Training
March 2007	Mike Gonzalez
April 2007	Andruw Jones (Sold Out)
May 2007	Hubbard & Johnson (Sold Out)
June 2007	John Smoltz
July 2007	Diaz & Harris
August 2007	Edgar Renteria
September 2007	Mark Teixeira
October 2007	Jeff Francoeur
November 2007	Chipper Jones
December 2007	John Smoltz
January 2008	Tom Glavine
February 2008	Tim Hudson
March 2008	Mark Kotsay
April 2008	Teixeira & Jones
May 2008	Brian McCann
June 2008	Jair Jurrjens
July 2008	Chipper Jones
August 2008	McCann & Jones
September 2008	Skip Caray
October 2008	Brian McCann
November 2008	Chipper Jones
December 2008	Pete Van Wieren
January 2009	Frank Wren
February 2009	Hank Aaron
March 2009	Derek Lowe
April 2009	Vazquez, Lowe & Kawakami
May 2009	Bobby Cox & Chipper Jones
June 2009	Jeff Francoeur
July 2009	Nate McLouth
August 2009	Tommy Hanson
September 2009	Martin Prado
October 2009	Yunel Escobar
November 2009	Peter Moylan
December 2009	Jason Heyward
January 2010	Billy Wagner
February 2010	Jair Jurrjens
March 2010	Derek Lowe

Numerous Options Still Allow Fans Across The Country To Follow Every Pitch



STAYING CONNECTED

BY JON ROSS

TBS CHANGED THE BRAVES' WORLD forever when it pulled the plug on its national telecasts at the end of the 2007 season. With that decision, legions of non-local fans in every corner of the country were left without a familiar source for game-day viewing.

In TBS' wake, three regional television providers took up new broadcast roles around the Southeast. These players, coupled with advances in technology and expanded pay-per-view access, still make it possible to watch every pitch of every Braves game from anywhere in the United States.

This season, primary television options for Braves fans in the five-and-a-half-state area designated as the Braves' market (Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, western North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee) are the same as last year — SportSouth, FOX Sports South and Peachtree TV. SportSouth will show 79 games, Peachtree TV will be responsible for 45, and Fox Sports South will offer 26. (See pages 52-53 for the complete schedule.)

A few changes during the off-season will have an effect on programming. Last year, announcer Jon Sciambi left SportSouth and FOX Sports South, taking a job with ESPN. This winter, Chip Caray and Turner Sports parted ways, but Caray landed on his feet and can now be found calling games on SportSouth and Fox Sports South, rather than on Peachtree TV.

Joe Simpson is back to team with Caray on the two FOX outlets, as well as to continue as analyst on Peachtree TV. His partner on Peachtree TV had not been named at press time.

Additionally, Tom Glavine's duties in his new position as special assistant to the Braves president include working some broadcasts on TV and radio.

Peachtree TV officials also have produced another version of the perennial "Braves Play Here" promo with John Rich of the country group Big & Rich.

Because the stations follow the same team during the season, there exists somewhat of a symbiotic relationship among the providers. While regional broadcasters compete for viewers, showcasing the Braves fosters a communal feeling among station officials because they are all, in a sense, in it together.

"We're all competitors, but we're all focused on the same thing, and that's to give the fans the best viewing experience possible," said Walter Naar, Peachtree TV's executive director of programming and operations. "We do deliberate on deciding the schedule, but beyond that, it's just putting our best broadcast out there."

Braves fans outside the Southeast can pick up pay-per-view television coverage by subscribing to the MLB Extra Innings package. A subscription offers most fans the opportunity to see all, or nearly all, Braves games. For some games, the only coverage available is by the "other team's" broadcasters.

Black-out rules apply, so fans should be aware of how black-outs can impact them, based on where they live in relation to a major league team's market. The service costs $199, and most providers will spit the charge over four months. Call your local cable TV provider or DirecTV or 1-888-SPORTS-iN.

As usual, ESPN, FOX and TBS also will occasionally pick up high-profile games. ESPN, which is scheduled to show the Braves' Opening Day game against the Cubs (April 5, 4 p.m.), has a corner on the market for Sunday night games. FOX has its pick

of Saturday games, and is carrying two Braves games in May (May 1 and 8). TBS picks one Sunday game per week.

Streaming internet video has come a long way in the three years since TBS stopped covering Braves games, and one of the best viewing options for fans outside Braves territory is the web. Internet users once were relegated to 2-D boxscores that refreshed every 30 seconds or to unreliable internet radio, but Major League Baseball has started offering another way to watch.

MLB.tv streams video feeds all season, starting at $100 a year or $20 a month — $120 a year offers additional options, including the choice of home or away feeds. Ordering information can be found at mlb.com.

Of course, online boxscores have also benefited from technological advances, and the stat-oriented fan can sign on to cbssports.com or espn.com for interfaces that provide nearly real-time updates of on-the-field action. These outlets don't televise the game, but are nice options for keeping up with the Braves during the work day. Braves radio in Atlanta and around the region has been juggled for the past few years, and the team has once again found a new home — this time at Rock 100.5 FM and 680 The Fan. Games can be heard from Mississippi to Florida to Virginia on the Braves Radio Network, which last season consisted of more than 150 affiliates (a list of this year's stations is on page 49).

Fans across the nation also can listen to every game by subscribing to XM Radio at xmradio.com or 1-866-MLB-ONXM.

David Dickey, general manager of 680 The Fan, says station officials have had a busy off-season signing up radio affiliates and providing them with new high-tech equipment in order to better present games.

680 The Fan will bring a new level of programming to the Braves Radio Network, Dickey says. With a combination of pre- and post-game shows and expanded morning drive-time coverage, he says he believes the station can increase the team's regional radio cachet.

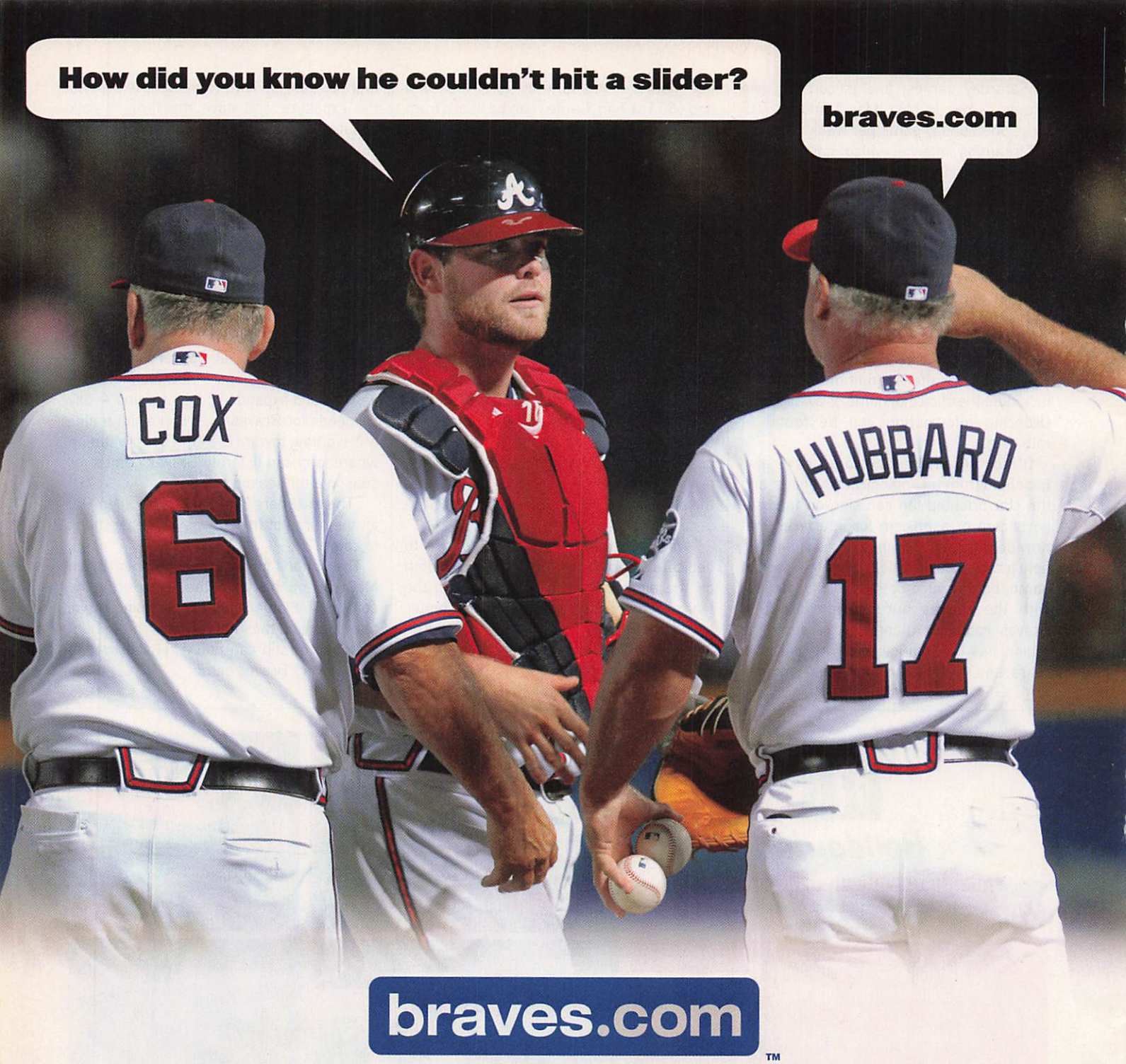
"We have the ability and the desire to dedicate all of our resources and time, both on the air and off the air, to serving the team — to providing a bigger and better broadcast," Dickey said. "[The Braves] do an awful lot in the community. If the intent is just to air the games and only the games, then it's very difficult to be able to provide the exposure and have the time to talk about all of these great things that the team does."

Current programming plans include a morning show featuring former Braves pitching coach Leo Mazzone and pre-game programming with Mazzone, former Braves second baseman Mark Lemke and Buck Belue.

Dickey also has facilitated a radio booth upgrade for game broadcasters Don Sutton and Jim Powell, building what he calls a "SportsCenter set" at Turner Field. He's hoping these additions — new technology, a new set and expanded programming — pay dividends for Braves fans. Dickey ultimately is working toward creating a radio station where fans can listen to Braves games for season after season.

"The goal here," he said, "is to keep 680 as the home of the Braves for generations to come."

The options for watching Chipper, Brian McCann and the rest of the team during the coming season are abundant. Using radio, television and the internet, fans throughout the country still can find a reliable way to follow every Braves game.



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Melky Cabrera Brings Numerous Skills And A Championship Pedigree To The Outfield

VALUABLE ADDITION

BY MARK BOWMAN
OF MLB.COM

When the Braves traded Javier Vazquez to the Yankees in December, they quickly learned that many of their fans were not too excited about the fact that Melky Cabrera was the only major leaguer included in the return package.

Initial displeasure surrounding the deal was slightly diminished when some of those same fans came to understand the potential of 19-year-old righthander Arodys Vizcaino, who could prove to be the most influential portion of the proceeds provided by the Yankees.

But while Cabrera certainly isn't the power-hitting slugger that fans were hoping to receive in exchange for Vazquez, Atlanta is excited about the value he could bring while serving as a versatile outfielder whose offensive potential may yet to have been realized.

"His power is going to come," said new utilityman Eric Hinske, who played with Cabrera last year with the Yankees. "I think he hit 13 homers last year, but he's got 20-plus capabilities."

While playing with the World Series champion Yankees last year, Cabrera hit .274 with the 13 homers, racking up 10 stolen bases and sporting a .752 OPS. With a quick evaluation of the numbers, Bobby Cox believes it's easy to understand why the versatile 25-year-old outfielder found himself overshadowed by the likes of Derek Jeter, Alex Rodriguez and Mark Teixeira.

"When you hit .270 with 13 [homers] there, nobody talks about you," Cox said. "I like Melky. He's a solid outfielder, has a good arm, knows how to play the game, and he's a great kid. He's a good leader, from what I've seen."

At first glance, it would be easy to look at the 5-foot-11, 200-pound Cabrera and mistake him for a catcher. But those who saw him patrol the Yankees' outfield the past four years certainly realize that he doesn't look anything like any of the Molina brothers once he starts racing toward flyballs.

ALLISON SHIRREFFS

Cabrera was only 20 years old when he got his first callup by the Yankees in 2005, and he averaged playing in 141 games for them over the four seasons since then.

"He was by far the best defensive outfielder we had," said Braves reliever Scott Proctor, who shared the Yankees clubhouse with Cabrera during the 2006 and '07 seasons. "When you're toeing the rubber, he's definitely a guy that you want to have behind you."

With Jason Heyward seemingly improving the odds that he'll begin the season as Atlanta's starting rightfielder, it appears the switch-hitting Cabrera will likely begin the season sharing the left-field duties with Matt Diaz.

But with his versatility, Cabrera likely will spend time at each of the outfield positions. Last year, he made more starts in center (97) than anyone else on the Yankees. The fact that he got his first major league exposure in New York at the tender age of 20 in 2005 makes it clear he has exceptional skill and makeup, and he's averaged 141 games per season in the four years since then.

During the first two games of the Grapefruit League season, Cabrera didn't have the opportunity to show the power of his arm. But while batting leadoff and playing center field in the 9-5 win over the Mets Mar. 3, Cabrera did display his speed, nearly beating out a first-inning grounder to the third-base side of the mound. Five innings later, he drew a walk to spark a four-run uprising.

"He's a guy that's going to put some good at-bats together," Proctor said. "He's going to hit to the situation and [be] a gap guy. He's just a good all-around hitter. It's going to be interesting to see how he fits in the National League. I think his talents are going to be better exposed in the National League than they were in the American League."

As a switch-hitter with strong fielding skills, Cabrera also could certainly prove valuable as part of late-inning substitutions that are much more frequent in the NL. But at the same time, the Braves recognize that his background with the Yankees has given him a chance to be recognized as much more than simply a role player.

"He's just a gamer," Proctor said. "He just knows how to play the game the right way. He comes from a winning background, too, with the Yankees. So he knows how to play the game down the stretch. The pressure isn't going to get to him."

COMING ATTRACTIONS

Award Winners Heyward And Kimbrel Highlight 400 Fan Club's Annual Banquet

By Jon Cooper

THERE'S ALWAYS a feeling of optimism surrounding the Braves 400 Fan Club's annual winter banquet, the Eddie Glennon Gameboree.

This year, some of that could be attributed to the event's taking place approximately a week before pitchers and catchers reported for spring training. However, there was an added good feeling surrounding this year's event, held Feb. 13 at the Marriott Perimeter Center, due to the top honorees and how they are expected to impact the Braves' future.

Three especially stood out. They were Jason Heyward, winner of the Hank Aaron Award as the organization's outstanding minor league hitter, reliever Craig Kimbrel, given the Phil Niekro Award as the team's outstanding minor league pitcher, and Tommy Hanson, who did not attend, winner of the club's 2009 National League Rookie of the Year.

"It was a tremendous night," said Kurt Kemp, the Braves' director of player development. "Two great prospects in Jason and in Craig, being selected as our minor league pitcher and position player of the year, I think are great honors. Tommy Hanson was up on that stage last year, and I think that says great things about what can be in the future for those two players."

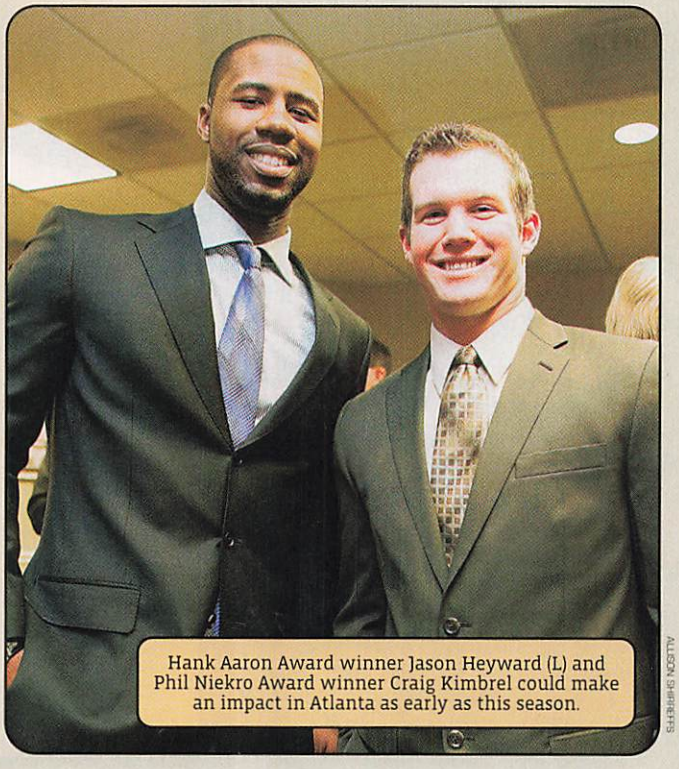
All three players spent time at Triple-A Gwinnett last season. Hanson pitched the first two months of the season there, and Heyward and Kimbrel finished there.

Hanson, the 2009 Phil Niekro Award winner, started his dominating 2009 at Gwinnett, where in 11 starts he pitched to a 1.49 ERA, striking out 90 while walking only 17. He was nearly as dominant in the majors, going11-4 with and a 2.89 ERA.

Heyward and Kimbrel were spectacular on the minor league level.

Heyward showed why he was named the No. 1 prospect in all of baseball by numerous sources. The 19-year-old outfielder, a first-round pick (14th overall) by the Braves in 2007, progressed through Myrtle Beach (advanced-A) and Mississippi (Double-A) before finishing at Gwinnett. For the season, he batted a combined .323, with 25 doubles, 4 triples, 17 homers and 63 RBIs.

"I've been a Braves fan my whole life. To be given an award with the name Hank Aaron on it is very special to me," said Heyward in his acceptance speech. "I'm glad to be in Atlanta celebrating this. I appreciate what has been a beautiful evening."



Hank Aaron Award winner Jason Heyward (L) and Phil Niekro Award winner Craig Kimbrel could make an impact in Atlanta as early as this season.

ALLSON SPORTS

Kemp felt that the poise Heyward displayed personifies him.

"Everything that you hear and read about him is genuine," said Kemp. "All you have to do is look up on the stage and see an imposing 6-5, 240-pound young man, but also in the way he carries himself, the way he handles himself. That goes back and reflects directly on the great family that he has. He is just a terrific young man."

Not nearly as well-documented but equally impressive is Kimbrel, who started 2009 in Rome (A) but also played at Myrtle Beach and Mississippi before finishing at Gwinnett. The 21-year-old was drafted twice by the Braves, first in 2007 in the 33rd

BRAVES 400 FAN CLUB AWARDS

"Red Wooten" High School Player of the Yea
Zack Wheeler, East Paulding High

Jason Varitek Award
(College Scholar/Player of the Year)
Luke Murton, Georgia Tech

Minor League Manager of the Year
Paul Runge, Danville Braves

Bill Lucas Award
(performance on and off the field)
Greg Creek, Mississippi Braves

Hank Aaron Award
Jason Heyward, Gwinnett Braves

Phil Niekro Award
Craig Kimbrel, Mississippi Braves

Luke Appling Nostalgia Award
Bobby Richardson

National League Rookie of the Year
Tommy Hanson

Phil Niekro Scholarships
Morehouse College, Georgia State University

Ivan Allen Jr. "Mr. Baseball" Award
Johnny Tallant

round (he didn't sign, choosing to pitch another year at Wallace State Community College in Hanceville, Ala.), then again in the third round in 2008.

As he accepted his award, the 5-11, 205-pound native of Huntsville, Ala., kidded that the photo of him on the video screen, made him look really mean, something he isn't.

He may not be mean, but on the mound, he certainly is nasty.

The hard-throwing righthander struck out 103 batters in 60 innings at his four minor league stops, allowing only 19 earned runs and 30 hits, while limiting opposing hitters to a .150 batting average. In two seasons in the Braves organization, Kimbrel has 159 strike-outs in 95 1/3 innings, and opponents are hitting a mere .143 against him.

Like Heyward, Kimbrel was blown away by being associated with a Braves legend and Hall of Famer.

"I can't even put words with it," he said. "It's an honor. I hope next year I can build off this and have a good year."

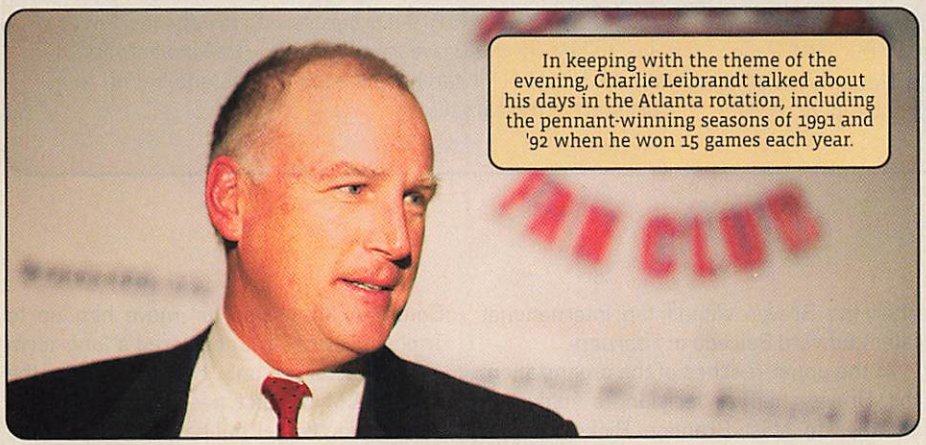
Kimbrel, who has been called "a right-handed Billy Wagner" by Frank Wren, said later that he is excited to be going to spring training, where he'll have a chance to confer with Wagner in person.

"It's amazing," he said. "When I go down to spring training, I'm going to try to sit back, listen to what he has to say. It's going to be awesome. I'm really looking forward to it."

Other highlights of the evening included the presentation of the Braves 400 Fan Club's Luke Appling Nostalgia Award to former Yankees second baseman Bobby Richardson, a seven-time All-Star and MVP of the 1960 World Series.

The evening, emceed by radio broadcaster Jim Powell, included a salute to great Atlanta Braves starting rotations. It began with a video presentation of the highlights of Braves starting pitching over the years. Former Braves lefty Charlie Leibrandt, an important part of the 1991 and '92 NL Champions (15 wins each season), then reminisced about his Atlanta days.

The final honor of the evening was the Ivan Allen Jr. "Mr. Baseball" Award. The winner was former Braves 400 Fan Club president Johnny Tallant. Current club president Wayne Coleman praised Tallant for "introducing countless kids to baseball, taught them the game, made it enjoyable so that they could become lifelong baseball fans and appreciate the enjoyment and excitement that baseball can bring."



In keeping with the theme of the evening, Charlie Leibrandt talked about his days in the Atlanta rotation, including the pennant-winning seasons of 1991 and '92 when he won 15 games each year.

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BY BILL BALLEW

HALE IS YET ANOTHER PROMISING PITCHER FROM LAST YEAR'S DRAFT

FOR ONLY THE THIRD TIME in franchise history, the Braves last year selected players from four-year colleges with their first two picks in the June draft.

Owning the sixth overall choice, which represented the team's highest slot since 1991, Atlanta took Vanderbilt lefthander Mike Minor in the first round. After missing the second round due to the signing of free agent Derek Lowe, the Braves dipped back into the collegiate ranks by choosing righthander David Hale of Princeton in the third round.

While Minor got the headlines last August after receiving the largest signing bonus ever given to the sixth overall pick, Hale has flown under the radar by comparison. Despite the lack of attention, the righthander is considered to be one of the top prospects in the Atlanta organization. Hale overpowered the Appalachian League in seven outings late last year, going 2-1 with a 1.13 ERA in 16 innings. He continued to impress during spring training.

TOM PREDDY

David Hale, only one semester shy of a Princeton degree, is making an impression now that he can concentrate on pitching instead of bookwork.

"Last year at Danville was about what I expected in my first taste of pro ball," Hale said. "As far as spring training is concerned, I had no idea what to expect. It's actually been more laidback than I thought it might be. All of the coaches understand the process we're going through, and they're not pressuring us too hard. I'm really pleased with how calm everything has been and how you can gradually get into your rhythm."

Recruited as an infielder by Princeton, Hale did not begin pitching until his senior year of high school. He attracted some late interest from pro scouts prior to attending college, where he wound up pitching in 26 games over his three years at the school. Hale saw the majority of his playing time in right field and responded by hitting .291.

Scouts, however, were most impressed with Hale's lightning-quick arm that generates fastballs in the 93-94 mph range and as high as 96 mph. He also throws a devastating slider in the mid-80s and is working on a changeup. According to Hale, he has made considerable improvements in recent months by concentrating solely on pitching.

"I have no doubt that focusing on pitching for the first time in my career is really helping me become a better player," Hale said. "For instance, when playing catch, I can work on my grips and keeping my mechanics in sync. Just having the mindset of a pitcher all of the time will enable me to make some big strides this year."

Another factor helping Hale is not having the dual role of being a student/athlete. Ivy League schools have a reputation for challenging even the most dedicated students, and Princeton is no different. Adding baseball to the mix failed to overwhelm Hale, who has one semester remaining to earn his degree after completing the first part of his senior year last fall.

"I've always pushed myself to do as well as I can in anything I'm doing," Hale said. "Playing baseball and keeping up with my schoolwork at Princeton was definitely tough. It wasn't a breeze at all. Having baseball practice for a few hours a day, studying until midnight or 2 a.m., and then getting up early to lift was difficult until I got into a pattern and accepted it. I feel fortunate that I was able to go to college, which is something I can fall back on in the event this doesn't work out. Hopefully, that won't be the case."

Hale lives in Marietta, a northern suburb of Atlanta, and wanted nothing more than to be drafted by the Braves last June. With that scenario a reality, he is transferring his focus from the classroom and the outfield to the mound to make certain he takes full advantage of the opportunity.

"Spring training has been incredible, but I have no idea where I'll pitch this season," Hale said. "It really doesn't matter to me. I just want to make progress with my pitches. I'm so happy to be with the Braves, and I'm really looking forward to the ride. Hopefully, I can have a good season and get off to a great start in my career."

LOGJAM AT SHORTSTOP

Finalizing minor league rosters during the waning days of spring training is like putting together a giant jigsaw puzzle. That situation was expected to be particularly difficult this year at shortstop, especially after the Braves signed top international talent Edward Salcedo in February.

At the upper reaches of the organization, the Braves had a decision to make on whether to start Brandon Hicks back at Double-A Mississippi or move him up to Triple-A Gwinnett. Considered a long-term answer at short only two years ago, the Texas A&M product has proven to be an outstanding fielder but has struggled at the

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

plate. He has a career batting average of .245, and hit .237 with 10 home runs and 48 RBIs last season at Double A, rallying from .219 on July 30. He was at his best in August, when he had seven doubles, a triple, four home runs and 16 RBIs.

"The guy worked as hard as anyone you'll see, and he finally started to get some results late in the season," said Mississippi manager Phillip Wellman. "His defense is well above average, but the question is whether or not he's going to hit consistently enough at higher levels. He has a chance to do it, and you can bet he'll give you everything he's got."

Speculation is that Salcedo could open the season at either advanced-A Myrtle Beach or Class-A Rome. However, Salcedo first had to obtain a work visa and get to the Braves' camp in Orlando. What's more, Salcedo is only 18, and the Braves also have to consider where last year's fourth-round pick, Mycal Jones, fits best on the organization.

At 22, Jones is four years older than Salcedo but does not have the challenge of adapting to a new culture. He also has played college baseball and spent last season at rookie-level Danville, where he led the Appalachian League with 50 runs and six triples. Jones has solid range and steady hands and is ready to make the move to a full-season club.

Salcedo's placement in the farm system also could affect Matt Weaver, the Braves' ninth-round draft pick last year out of Burlington (N.J.) Community College, and Chris Lovett, a 12th-round selection in 2009 from Columbia State (Tenn.) Community College. Weaver and Lovett struggled at the plate last season in the Gulf Coast League and could return to the GCL or move up to Danville. Another player in the picture is Ivan Marin, a 21-year-old signed in February out of Nicaragua.

"It's a nice problem to have, especially considering the fact that we lacked some depth at the position as recently as a year ago," said Kurt Kemp, Atlanta's director of player development. "These situations usually have a way of working out on the field, and I'm sure that will prove to be the case once again as we progress through the spring and the season."

OUT FOR THE YEAR

Left-handed pitcher Dimaster Delgado fractured his left hand and injured his right leg in a car accident in his native country of Panama in February.

I WANT THE BIG TEAM TO TAKE ME SERIOUSLY

I FEEL LIKE THINGS have gone well in spring training. I met some of the other players last year when I went to Rome and then during Instructional League before I headed to Arizona for the fall league.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Mike Minor was the Braves' first-round draft pick last June out of Vanderbilt and the sixth player selected overall. The 6-foot-4 lefthander made four late-season starts at Class-A Rome (0.64 ERA in 14 innings) before pitching in the Arizona Fall League and then seeing some activity with the major league club in spring training.

It was fun to travel with the big league guys and see what they are doing, especially how they carry themselves and go about their business. I tried to sit back and see, for example, how guys tip the clubbies when we get paid. I'm not used to that, so that was a little bit of a learning experience.

I worked out a lot more prior to this season than I did while I was in college. The best part was I didn't have to worry about going to class or being rushed.

Since I didn't have a job this past off-season, I was able to focus on baseball and getting better with my workouts five days a week. I had a trainer who picked me up around noon every day, and I wound up getting a lot bigger and stronger than I did in three years of college.

One aspect I'm really enjoying is concentrating solely on becoming a better baseball player. I go to the field the same time every day and get my work in. I don't have to worry about studying for tests or writing papers.

Being a starter, it can get a little boring between outings, but it's also a lot of fun getting a chance to go to different places and prepare to compete against some of the best players in the world.

> "IT'S FUN PITCHING AGAINST WOOD BATS, WHICH ARE A LOT EASIER THAN THE ALUMINUM MODELS I SAW IN COLLEGE."

I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to play at Vanderbilt. Coach (Tim) Corbin and my pitching coach, Derek Johnson, did a great job of preparing me to be the best player I could become.

I wound up pitching as a freshman on Saturdays, right behind (now Tampa Bay's) David Price in the starting rotation. I started out pitching midweek games against smaller schools, and then I moved into relief on the weekends when conference games started. Pretty soon I became a starter, which is when I realized I had the chance to be pretty good.

I looked at the guys who worked with our pitching coach before going on to play at the next level and thought I could be one of those guys, too.

It's fun pitching against wood bats, which are a lot easier than the aluminum models I saw in college. When a batter fails to hit the ball well, he's not going to get a basehit like he did in college.

Of course, the higher you go in professional baseball, the better the hitters are. If you leave a ball up in the strike zone or make any other kind of mistake, they're going to hit it. I saw that first-hand in the fall league and this spring.

My control has always returned quickly in the spring, and now I'm trying to hit my spots. I still need to work on my breaking ball, which I struggle with from time to time. I developed a new grip on that pitch and got a later break on the ball. Hopefully, in a month or two, I'll be able to throw it for strikes any time I need it. It's my third pitch, behind my fastball and changeup.

I can't wait for the season to start. I knew I wasn't trying to earn a spot on the big league team. I was just there to get some work and soak in the atmosphere.

I want to get started so I can begin making progress and possibly move up so the big league club can take me seriously.

Delgado broke bones in his throwing hand, just above the wrist, and injured the upper part of his right leg. The Braves flew him to Atlanta in order to visit with team doctors, who estimated that Delgado will miss all or most of the season. There is hope, however, that he might be able to return to the mound during the fall Instructional League.

Delgado made significant strides in his development last season at Rome. The lefthander made 17 starts in the South Atlantic League and went 5-7 with a 3.61 ERA. He throws one of the best changeups in the organization and mixes that pitch with a solid low-90s fastball and an improving curveball. Prior to the accident, Delgado was expected to pitch at Myrtle Beach this year.

ORGANIZATIONAL NOTES

• Four members of the organization, led by top-ranked **Jason Heyward**, were on the Top 100 Prospects list of trade publication Baseball America. Joining Heyward were first baseman **Freddie Freeman** at No. 32 and pitchers **Julio Teheran** (No. 51) and **Arodys Vizcaino** (No. 69). The 19-year-old Teheran was the top prospect in the Appalachian League last season prior to an August promotion to Rome. Vizcaino was rated the third-best prospect in the Yankees' organization over the winter before being traded to the Braves in the deal that sent Javier Vazquez to New York.

• Reliever **Cory Gearrin** has been unheralded in the organization while making steady improvements. The righthander had a 1.84 ERA and 17 saves in 27 games at Myrtle Beach and a 2.84 ERA and two saves in 20 outings at Mississippi last year. Using a sidearm delivery that can drop even lower, Gearrin spent some time earlier this year working on his mechanics with former Braves reliever Gene Garber, who used a similar delivery. The result has been better command that could have him contributing in Atlanta at some point this season.

• With Heyward receiving much of the accolades during spring training, Freeman, the outfielder's best friend and fellow prospect, also made a strong impression on the Atlanta brass. Bobby Cox said Freeman's strong play at first base was one of the most pleasant surprises of the spring. Freeman also was driving the ball with more consistency than he did last year, when he struggled while battling a rib injury and a bruised hand. "He was disappointed about his year, but we weren't, because we understood the ailments he had," said Kurt Kemp. "He's swinging the bat the way he did two years ago, and I believe that's going to help set the stage for a very big season."

• Bobby Cox was also impressed with the efforts of reliever **Craig Kimbrel**, who saw activity in major league camp for the first time in his career. Kimbrel has a dominating fastball that has been clocked as high as 98 mph and an excellent breaking ball that could allow him to help the Atlanta bullpen at some point during the season. "Compared to where he was a year ago, Craig has made an incredible amount of improvement," Kemp said. "He is commanding his pitches better than at any time we've seen him since he joined the organization (in 2008)."

• The Braves signed catcher and righthanded hitter **J.R. House** to a minor league contract in late February. A former top prospect in the Pittsburgh organization, he has played in 32 games at the major league level during stints with the Pirates, Astros and Orioles. House, who spent the 2009 season with Triple-A Omaha in the Kansas City farm system, is expected to give Gwinnett manager **Dave Brundage** some power potential in the lineup as well as defensive flexibility since he also can play the infield corners and left field.

• The Braves signed non-drafted free agent catcher **Ryan Query** after he worked out for area scout **Billy Best**. Query earned third-team Division II All-America honors last season at Catawba (N.C.) College.

• The Braves released right-handed pitcher **Rico Reid** and first baseman **Ryohei Shimabukuro** just prior to the start of spring training. Reid was a 25th-round draft choice out of Sharpsburg, Ga., in 2007 who pitched only 40 innings in three years with the organization. Shimabukuro, who signed with the Braves out of Japan in 2006, batted .236 in 237 trips to the plate over parts of three seasons at the rookie level.

• The ballpark in Gwinnett has a new name - Coolray Field - after the Braves and Coolray Heating and Cooling, based in Marietta, Ga., came to terms on the naming rights for the one-year-old facility. The 16-year agreement is expected to bring in $10 million, split between the team and county.

• The G-Braves and Gwinnett Medical Center Foundation are hosting a "Step Up to the Plate" fundraiser on Saturday, April 17, from 1-5 p.m. at Coolray Field. Tickets are $100 and include 10 swings on the field, as well as a cap and commemorative t-shirt. All proceeds will benefit the Miles and Lib Mason Children's Clinic, which provides pediatric care to Gwinnett County's underinsured children, and the Atlanta Braves Foundation.

• Myrtle Beach named **Scott Brown** as the Pelicans' general manager. Brown replaces **North Johnson**, who accepted the same position with the Gwinnett Braves in January. Brown, who served as GM of the Double-A Binghamton Mets for the past five seasons, is the son of Robert W. Brown, who was the Baltimore Orioles' public relations director for 35 years.

• Citing the ability to introduce new and better food selections, as well as greater freedom to offer more deals and discounts, the Myrtle Beach Pelicans will bring their concessions in-house. The Pelicans have hired **Brad Leininger** as their director of food and beverage. Among the initial changes announced by the team are the inclusion of "Kids Eat Free Monday" and "Thirsty Thursday" for every home game.

• The Pelicans auctioned three different types of uniforms over a three-week period in March. Among those offered were the No. 12 home vest worn by Freeman, the No. 47 alternate jersey worn by Tom Glavine in his 2008 rehab start, and the batting practice tops worn by outfielders Heyward and **Cody Johnson**.

• **Van Pope** is attempting to move to the mound from third base during spring training. The 26-year-old righthander batted .202 last year at Gwinnett.

HOME OPENERS

TEAM	DATE	TIME	OPPONENT
GWINNETT	APRIL 8	7:05 P.M.	CHARLOTTE
MISSISSIPPI	APRIL 8	7:05 P.M.	TENNESSEE
MYRTLE BEACH	APRIL 8	7:05 P.M.	WILMINGTON
ROME	APRIL 16	7 P.M.	SAVANNAH

RADIO NETWORK

AL	Auburn	WAUD-AM	1230
AL	Brewton	WKNU-FM	106.3
AL	Cullman	WKUL-FM	92.1
AL	Florence	WYTK-FM	93.9
AL	Foley	WHEP-AM	1310
AL	Foley	WHEP-FM	92.5
AL	Guntersville	WTWX-FM	95.9
AL	Huntsville	WUMP-AM	730
AL	Jasper	WJLX-AM	1240
AL	Jasper	WJLX-FM	101.5
AL	Montgomery	WMSP-AM	740
AL	Montgomery	WNZZ-AM	950
AL	Roanoke	WELR-AM	1360
AL	Scottsboro	WWIC-AM	1050
AL	Tallassee	WACQ-AM	1130
AL	Tallassee	WACQ-FM	101.1
AL	Thomasville	WJDB-AM	630
AL	Thomasville	WJDB-FM	95.5
FL	Crestview	WJSB-AM	1050
FL	Crestview	WAAZ-FM	104.7
FL	Fort Walton Beach	WFTW-AM	1260
FL	Melbourne	WSJZ-FM	95.9
GA	Adairsville	WJTH-FM	101.7
GA	Albany	WGPC-AM	1450
GA	Americus	WISK-FM	98.7
GA	Athens	WRFC-AM	960
GA	Athens	WGAU-FM	1340
GA	Atlanta	WCNN-AM	680
GA	Atlanta	WNNX-FM	100.5
GA	Augusta	WGAC-AM	580
GA	Bainbridge	WGMK-FM	106.3
GA	Blackshear	WFNS-AM	1350
GA	Brunswick	WSFN-AM	790
GA	Calhoun	WJTH-AM	900
GA	Carrollton	WLBB-AM	1330
GA	Carrollton	WBTR-FM	92.1
GA	Claxton	WCLA-AM	1470
GA	Clayton	WGHC-AM	1370
GA	Columbus	WRCG-AM	1420
GA	Columbus	WRCG-FM	106.9
GA	Cornelia	WCON-AM	1450
GA	Cornelia-NE Georgia	WCON-FM	99.3
GA	Dalton	WBLJ-AM	1230
GA	Dalton	WYYU-FM	104.5
GA	Douglas-Fitzgerald	WDMG-AM	860
GA	Elberton	WSGC-FM	105.3
GA	Ellijay	WLJA-FM	101.1
GA	Ellijay	WPGY-AM	1580
GA	Gainesville	WGGA-AM	1240
GA	Greensboro	WDDK-FM	103.9
GA	Griffin	WKEU-AM	1450
GA	Hazlehurst-Baxley	WVOH-FM	93.5
GA	Hiawassee	WNGM-AM	1230
GA	Jesup	WLOP-AM	1370
GA	Jesup	WIFO-FM	105.5
GA	LaGrange	WLAG-AM	1240
GA	Louisville	WPEH-FM	92.1
GA	Macon-Warner Robbins	WROK-FM	105.5
GA	Milledgeville	WMVG-AM	1450
GA	Milledgeville	WKZR-FM	102.3
GA	Monroe	WKUN-AM	1490
GA	Moultrie	WMTM-AM	1300
GA	Moultrie	WMTM-FM	93.9
GA	Sandersville	WSNT-AM	1490
GA	Sandersville	WSNT-FM	99.9
GA	Savannah	WSEG-AM	1400
GA	Statesboro	WPTB-AM	850
GA	Swainsboro	WJAT-AM	800
GA	Thomaston	WTGA-AM	1590
GA	Thomaston	WTGA-FM	101.1
GA	Thomasville	WPAX-AM	1240
GA	Tifton	WTIF-AM	1340
GA	Tifton	WTIF-FM	107.5
GA	Toccoa	WNEG-AM	630
GA	Trenton	WKWN-AM	1420
GA	Trenton	WKWN-FM	106.1
GA	Vidalia	WVOP-AM	970
GA	Vidalia	WYUM-FM	101.7
MS	Hattiesburg	WHSY-AM	950
MS	Jackson	WJDX-AM	620
MS	McComb	WHNY-AM	1250
NC	Asheville	WISE-AM	1310
NC	Fayetteville	WAZZ-AM	1490
NC	Franklin	WFSC-AM	1050
NC	High Point	WBLO-AM	790
NC	Rutherfordton	WCAB-AM	590
NC	Salisbury	WSTP-AM	1490
NC	Shelby	WADA-AM	1390
NC	Sylva	WRGC-AM	680
NC	Waynesville	WYSE-AM	970
SC	Camden	WCAM-AM	1590
SC	Camden	WPUB-FM	102.7
SC	Charleston	WQNT-AM	1450
SC	Clinton	WPCC-AM	1410
SC	Columbia	WCOS-AM	1400
SC	Fountain Inn	WFIS-AM	1600
SC	Fountain Inn	WFIS-FM	105.5
SC	Seneca	WSNW-AM	1150
SC	Seneca	WSNW-FM	103.3
SC	Spartanburg	WSPG-AM	1400
SC	Spartanburg	WSPG-FM	97.1
SC	Union	WBCU-AM	1460
SC	Union	WBCU-FM	103.5
SC	Walterboro	WALI-FM	93.7
SC	Woodruff	WQUL-AM	1510
SC	Woodruff	WQUL-FM	95.9
TN	Chattanooga	WDEF-AM	1370
TN	Clarksville	WJZM-AM	1400
TN	Cleveland	WCLE-AM	1570
TN	Cleveland	WCLE-FM	104.1
TN	Johnson City	WXSM-AM	640
TN	Kingsport	WGOC-AM	1320
TN	Lenoir City	WLIL-AM	730
TN	Lewisburg	WJJM-AM	1490
TN	Louisville	WPEH-AM	1420
TN	Manchester	WMSR-AM	1320
TN	Manchester	WMSR-FM	94.9
TN	Martin	WCDZ-FM	95.1
TN	Murfreesboro	WGNS-AM	1450
TN	Murfreesboro	WGNS-FM	100.5
TN	Newport	WLIK-AM	1270
TN	Pigeon Forge	WPFT-FM	106.3
WV	Logan	WVOW-AM	1290
WV	Logan	WVOW-FM	101.9

TICKETING

TO PURCHASE TICKETS OR FOR TICKET INFORMATION, CALL (404) 577-9100 OR VISIT braves.com

INDIVIDUAL GAME TICKETS

Single game tickets are available at braves.com/tickets, the Braves box office at Turner Field, by calling 1-800-745-3000, and at all TicketMaster outlets.

FAMILY VALUE PLAN

Get 4 tickets, 4 hotdogs, 4 Cokes, a parking pass, a program and $5 Chevron gift card for as low as $59 (upper box seats). Upgrade to Outfield Pavilion for $79 (total) or Golden Moon Casino Pavilion for $99 (total).

SEASON TICKET PLANS

The following ticket plans are on sale. For more information, visit braves.com or call (404) 577-9100.

TYPE

***Added Value:** Save 20 percent by adding $10 to your game ticket, which is stored on the bar code for each game, for $8. The added value can be used at any concession stand. $10 is already included in the Henry Aaron and Club Level areas.

***755 Club:** A 755 Club membership is automatically included in Henry Aaron, Club Level and Club Pavilion areas.

***2-For-1:** 2-For-1 Season Tickets are available in rows 11 and higher in the Upper Box.

FULL SEASON (83 Games)

Level	*Type	Price
Henry Aaron Seats	Added Value/755 Club	$5,146
Dugout	Regular	$4,482
Terrace	Regular	$2,490
Field	Regular	$2,822
Club	Added Value/755 Club	$3,154
Outfield Pavilion	Regular	$1,162
Upper Box	2-For-1	$415
Terrace Reserved	Regular	$996
Field Reserved	Regular	$1,162
Club Pavilion	755 Club	$1,162
Upper Pavilion	Regular	$249

HALF SEASON (42 Games+)

Level	*Type	Price
Field	Regular	$1,512
Club	Added Value/755 Club	$1,764
Outfield Pavilion	Regular	$756
Upper Box	Regular	$462

WEEKENDS (30 Games+)

Level	*Type	Price
Field	Regular	$1,080
Club	Added Value/755 Club	$1,260
Outfield	Regular	$540
Upper Box	Regular	$330

20-GAMES

DALE MURPHY PLAN

(Variety of Tuesday games and all Fridays)

Level	*Type	Price
Field	Regular	$720
Club	Added Value/755 Club	$840

BOBBY COX PLAN

(Variety of Wednesday games and all Saturdays)

Level	*Type	Price
Field	Regular	$720
Field-Early Cox	Adult	$640
Club	Added Value/755 Club	$840

PHIL NIEKRO PLAN

(Variety of Thursdays and all Sundays)

Level	*Type	Price
Field	Regular	$720
Club	Added Value/755 Club	$840

WARREN SPAHN PLAN

(Only weekday games and all day games)

Level	*Type	Price
Field	Regular	$720
Club	Added Value/755 Club	$840

FLEX PLANS

* Minimum of 10 games for as low as $110 per seat.
* Change dates if your plans change.

Section	Gate Price	Flex Price
Golden Moon	$44/48	$42
Field Level	$38/42	$37
Terrace	$36/40	$35
Field/Terrace Pavilion	$24/28	$22
Upper Box	$12/16	$11

BOBBY COX 6-GAME PLAN

Opening Day plus five Saturdays.
April 5 vs. Cubs,
May 15 vs. Diamondbacks,
June 19 vs. Kansas City Royals,
July 3 vs. Marlins,
Aug. 14 vs. Dodgers,
Oct. 2 vs. Phillies.

Section	Gate Price	6-Pack	Package
Terrace	$36/40	$35	$210
Field/Terrace Pavilion	$24/28	$22	$132
Upper Box	$12/16	$11	$66

GROUP TICKETS

Groups of 20 or more receive discounted prices. Call (404) 577-9100 for information.

PRIVATE SUITES

Located on the Golden Moon Casino Level. Climate controlled suite plus access to outside balcony seating. TVs, refrigerator, icemaker, wet bar and telephone. Available from two hours before the game until the last pitch. Call (404) 577-9100.

5-GAME PLANS

Location	Price	Save Up To
Terrace	$175	13%
Field/Terrace Pavilion	$110	21%
Upper Box	$55	31%

ALUMNI SUNDAY

May 16 vs. Diamondbacks, June 20 vs. Royals, July 4 vs. Marlins, Aug. 8 vs. Giants, Sept. 12 vs. Cardinals.

RIVALS

April 22 vs. Phillies, May 17 vs. Mets, June 1 vs. Phillies, Aug. 31 vs. Mets, Oct. 2 vs. Phillies.

FRIDAY NIGHT FIREWORKS

April 30 vs. Astros, May 28 vs. Pirates, June 18 vs. Royals, July 2 vs. Marlins, Aug. 13 vs. Dodgers.

NL EAST

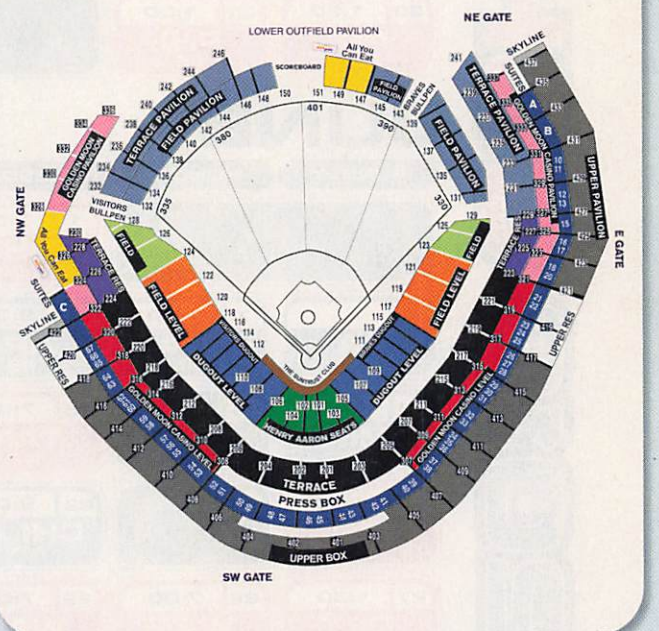
May 18 vs. Mets, June 1 vs. Phillies, June 28 vs. Nationals, Aug. 27 vs. Marlins, Sept. 2 vs. Mets.

NL CENTRAL

April 5 vs. Cubs, May 1 vs. Astros, May 28 vs. Pirates, July 16 vs. Brewers, Sept. 11 vs. Cardinals.

SUMMER SATURDAYS

May 29 vs. Pirates, June 26 vs. Tigers, July 17 vs. Brewers, Aug. 7 vs. Giants, Aug. 14 vs. Dodgers.



2010 SCHEDULE

HOME

AWAY

ALL GAMES ON ROCK 100.5, 680 THE FAN, AND RADIO NETWORK AFFILIATES.

ROCK 100.5 ATLANTA'S ROCK STATION

SPORTS RADIO 680 The Fan

FSS FS SOUTH

PTV Peachtree TV

SS SPORTSOUTH

FOX FOX

ESPN ESPN

APRIL

GAME TIMES EASTERN; SCHEDULE IS SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 1:05 EXHIBITION DET @Lakeland WFOM (1230 AM)	2 7:00 EXHIBITION CHI AL SS	3 1:00 EXHIBITION CHI AL FSS
4	5 4:00 CHC SS/ESPN	6	7 7:00 CHC PTV	8 7:00 CHC PTV	9 4:30 SF FSS	10 10:00 SF SS
11 4:00 SF FSS	12 6:30 SD SS	13	14 10:00 SD SS	15 6:30 SD SS	16 7:30 COL PTV	17 7:00 COL SS
18 1:30 COL FSS	19	20 7:00 PHI PTV	21 7:00 PHI PTV	22 7:00 PHI PTV	23 7:00 NYM SS	24 1:00 NYM SS
25 8:00 NYM ESPN	26 8:00 STL PTV	27 8:00 STL PTV	28 8:00 STL PTV	29 1:30 STL SS	30 7:30 HOU SS	

MAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 3:00 HOU FOX
2 1:30 HOU FSS	3	4 7:00 WAS SS	5 7:00 WAS SS	6 7:00 WAS SS	7 7:00 PHI SS	8 3:00 PHI FOX
9 1:30 PHI FSS/TBS	10 8:00 MIL SS	11 8:00 MIL SS	12 1:00 MIL SS	13	14 7:30 ARI PTV	15 7:00 ARI SS
16 1:30 ARI FSS	17 7:00 NYM PTV	18 7:00 NYM PTV	19 7:00 CIN PTV	20 1:00 CIN SS	21 7:00 PIT SS	22 7:00 PIT
23 1:30 PIT FSS	24	25 7:00 FLA SS	26 7:00 FLA SS	27 7:00 FLA SS	28 7:30 PIT PTV	29 7:00 PIT SS
30 1:30 PIT FSS	31 1:00 PHI SS					

JUNE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 7:00 PHI PTV/ESPN	2 1:00 PHI SS	3 10:00 LA SS	4 10:00 LA SS	5 10:00 LA SS
6 LA FSS	7 9:30 ARI SS	8 9:30 ARI SS	9 9:30 ARI SS	10 3:30 ARI SS	11 8:00 MIN SS	12 7:00 MIN SS
13 2:00 MIN FSS	14	15 7:00 TAM PTV	16 7:00 TAM PTV	17 7:00 TAM PTV	18 7:30 KC PTV	19 7:00 KC SS
20 1:30 KC FSS	21	22 8:00 CHI AL PTV	23 8:00 CHI AL PTV	24 2:00 CHI AL SS	25 7:30 DET PTV	26 4:00 DET SS
27 1:30 DET FSS	28 7:00 WAS PTV	29 7:00 WAS PTV	30 7:00 WAS SS			

2010 SCHEDULE

JULY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2 7:30 FLA PTV	3 4:00 FLA FOX
4 5:00 FLA FSS	5 7:00 PHI PTV	6 7:00 PHI PTV	7 7:00 PHI PTV	8	9 7:00 NY SS	10 4:00 NY FOX
11 1:00 NY FSS	12	13 ALL-STAR GAME ANAHEIM	14	15 7:00 MIL PTV	16 7:30 MIL PTV	17 7:00 MIL SS
18 1:30 MIL FSS	19	20 7:00 SD PTV	21 7:00 SD PTV	22 1:00 SD SS	23 7:00 FLA SS	24 7:00 FLA SS
25 1:00 FLA FSS	26	27 7:00 WAS SS	28 7:00 WAS SS	29 12:30 WAS SS	30 7:00 CIN SS	31 7:00 CIN SS

AUGUST

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1 1:00 CIN FSS	2 7:00 NYM ESPN	3 7:00 NYM PTV	4 7:00 NYM PTV	5 7:00 SF PTV	6 7:30 SF PTV	7 4:00 SF FOX
8 1:30 SF FSS	9 8:00 HOU SS	10 8:00 HOU SS	11 2:00 HOU SS	12	13 7:30 LA PTV	14 7:00 LA PTV
15 1:30 LA FSS	16 7:00 LA PTV	17 7:00 WAS SS	18 7:00 WAS SS	19 1:00 WAS SS	20 2:00 CHC SS	21 4:00 CHC FOX
22 CHC FSS	23 8:30 COL SS	24 8:30 COL SS	25 3:00 COL SS	26	27 7:30 FLA SS	28 4:00 FLA FOX
29 1:30 FLA FSS	30 7:00 NYM PTV	31 7:00 NYM PTV				

SEPT./OCT.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 7:00 NYM PTV/ESPN	2 7:00 NYM PTV	3 7:00 FLA SS	4 7:00 FLA SS
5 1:00 FLA FSS	6 1:30 PIT SS	7 7:00 PIT SS	8 7:00 PIT SS	9 7:00 STL PTV	10 7:30 STL PTV	11 4:00 STL FOX
12 1:30 STL FSS	13 7:00 WAS SS	14 7:00 WAS SS	15 12:00 WAS SS	16	17 7:00 NYM SS	18 4:00 NYM FOX
19 1:00 NYM FSS	20 7:00 PHI SS	21 7:00 PHI SS	22 7:00 PHI SS	23	24 7:00 WAS SS	25 1:00 WAS SS
26 1:30 WAS FSS	27 7:00 FLA SS	28 7:00 FLA SS	29 4:30 FLA SS	30	1 7:30 PHI SS	2 7:00 PHI SS
3 1:30 PHI FSS						

ROCK100.5 ATLANTA'S ROCK STATION

SPORTS RADIO 680 The Fan

ALL GAMES ON ROCK 100.5, 680 THE FAN, AND RADIO NETWORK AFFILIATES.

FSS FS SOUTH

PTV Peachtree TV

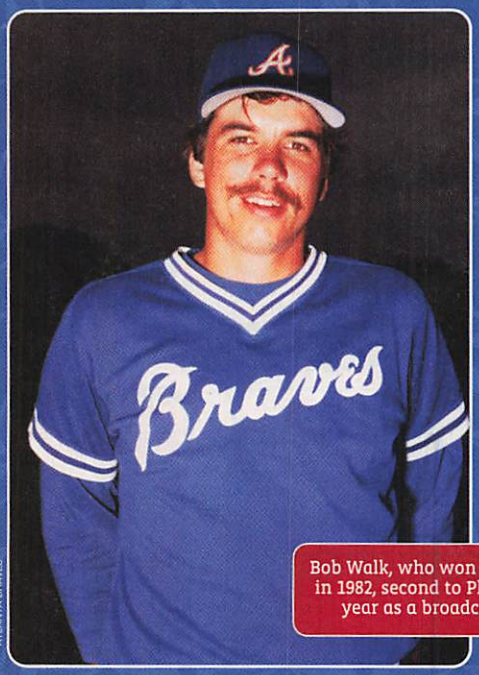
SS SPORTSOUTH

FOX FOX

ESPN ESPN

HOME

AWAY



ATLANTA BRAVES

PITTSBURGH PIRATES

Bob Walk, who won 11 games for the Braves in 1982, second to Phil Niekro, is in his 17th year as a broadcaster for Pittsburgh.

IN THE BOOTH

Once A Key Member Of '82 Division Title Club, Bob Walk Is Now A Veteran Pirates Broadcaster

BY BRIAN KNAPP

AS A COLOR ANALYST for Fox Sports Pittsburgh, Bob Walk draws assignments to some 150 Pirates games every season. It leaves the 53-year-old native of Van Nuys, Calif., some free time through which to pursue off-season interests, and inside Walk's garage rests one such pursuit: A stripped 1974 Chevrolet pickup truck that he plans to restore by the end of 2010.

"I like to tinker with things around the house," he said. "There's nothing but a bare frame there right now, but I'm slowly going to put things back on it."

The restoration project provides him with an escape from the trappings of a full-time job in baseball. Automobiles have long been a passion for the former Braves pitcher (1981-83), and he plans to have his 36-year-old Chevy back in driving shape sometime this fall.

"I'm a Chevy guy," Walk said. "I've tinkered around with cars my whole life. I think I'll have it finished and on the road by Halloween."

Walk is entering his 17th season in the broadcast booth for the Pittsburgh Pirates, the team with which he spent the majority of his 14-year career in the big leagues. The chance to move behind the microphone came while Walk was still an active player. Though he won 13 games for the Pirates in 1993, his 5.68 earned run average was indicative of a pitcher whose skills had eroded. As spring training dawned a year later, opportunity knocked.

"I went right from the field to the booth, in like a matter of days," Walk said. "They had an opening. They let go one of their color guys after the 1993 season, and they called me two to three weeks before spring training and asked me if I'd be interested. I was 37 years old, and my abilities were definitely diminishing. They brought me in for an interview, called me back, and made me an offer. I said, 'Okay, I'm retired now.'"

In an instant, Walk's playing career was over. He questioned whether or not he made the right move, but as time passed, he felt more and more at peace with his choice.

"It made retirement easier," he said. "I was still going to the ballpark every day. The bad part was, for the first couple of years, in my mind, I was thinking I should still be out there. 'Did I make this decision too soon?' I was still somewhat effective. You always have that thought in your mind: 'How long could I go?' But I definitely made the right decision."

Still, the job presented a new set of challenges. Calling games for the downtrodden Pittsburgh franchise – which has not experienced a winning season since 1993 and has not reached the playoffs since Sid Bream's slide for the Braves in the 1992 NLCS ended their march toward a World Series berth a year earlier – comes with its own difficulties. The Pirates have lost 90 games or more in seven of the last 10 seasons, topping out at 100 in 2001.

"The most challenging part of the job has been staying positive and trying to keep fans interested going into the second half," Walk

said. "Since we do work for the ballclub, we're 'homers,' and we always try to find the silver lining."

His experiences during a 14-year playing career – which included a World Series championship with the Phillies in 1980 (as a rookie, he started and won Game 1 against the Royals) – made for an easier transition from the mound to the broadcast booth.

"That's all I have. I'm not a broadcaster. I'm an ex-player who makes comments on the game," said Walk, who won 105 games in the major leagues. "Without my experience as a player, I wouldn't be able to do it."

The righthander won 12 of those games for the Braves. Acquired in the deal that sent Gary Matthews to Philadelphia in the spring of 1981, Walk was 12-13 in 45 appearances with the Braves. He won 11 games in 1982, second on the NL West division winning team behind Hall of Famer Phil Niekro, but failed to duplicate his success. Walk's tenure in Atlanta proved brief, as the Braves released him before the start of the 1984 season.

"I was shocked [when I got released]," Walk said. "I knew I wasn't their favorite pupil, and that's okay. That happens. But I didn't think I had fallen so far down the totem pole that they wouldn't want me."

The news struck Walk like a bolt of lightning, but it stoked the competitive fire burning within him. Only 27 at the time, he renewed his commitment to the game and set out to prove his detractors wrong.

"Being released is an eye-opener, but the sun came up the next day," Walk said. "I had to hook on with somebody. I started pitching much more relaxed. I think players put too much pressure on themselves, and that makes it where they can't perform to the best of their abilities. If you're good enough, you're good enough. I became a totally different pitcher. When I got knocked around, it didn't affect me as much. In Atlanta, when I had a bad outing, it stayed with me for quite a while."

Walk found a home with Pittsburgh (1984-94), which signed him a week after Atlanta released him. He won 82 games and helped the Pirates to three post-season appearances (1990-92). Nicknamed "The Whirly Bird," he was selected an NL All-Star in 1988, when he notched 12 victories and ranked eighth in the league with a 2.71 ERA. In 1992, he exacted some revenge against the Braves, tossing a complete-game victory against them in Game 5 of the NLCS after Jim Leyland pulled him out of the bullpen for a surprise start.

BY STEVE FALL

WHAT CAUSES A CURVE TO BREAK?

ALLISON SHIRREFFS

WHEN TOMMY HANSON (R) snaps off a perfect curveball, there's not much an opposing batter can do.

Hanson throws a classic "12-to-6" curve, which drops downward, as if moving from the 12 to the 6 on a clock. To make this happen, Hanson and other pitchers apply topspin.

A spinning baseball experiences what physicists call Magnus force. When the ball has topspin, the Magnus force is downward. Consequently, the ball breaks sharply in that direction.

The biggest factors in determining the size of a curveball's break are how fast it spins and how fast it moves, according to University of Illinois physics professor Alan Nathan. The spin is the more important of the two.

"It has everything to do with how the ball is spinning," said Nathan, who has a website called The Physics of Baseball (npl.illinois.edu/~a-nathan/pob). "The way the pitcher makes that happen is how he's gripping the ball and how he is releasing the ball."

Pitchers use their fingers so that they release the ball while pulling it down. This generates the topspin.

"Typically, the middle finger of the throwing hand might be sitting right on a seam, and when the ball is released, that finger finds itself on the front of the ball, pulling it down so that the back of the hand is facing the catcher almost," said Nathan.

Curveballs also possess a sideways component – away from the pitcher's throwing arm side – but most break more vertically than horizontally. Curveballs vary in speed, but usually travel 75 to 80 miles per hour.

"The seams don't have an enormous effect on how much the ball breaks, but they do have an effect on how much spin the pitcher can put on the ball," said Nathan. "In order to get the ball to spin, you are relying on the friction between your fingers and the ball. And you can get more friction with the seam than you can on the smooth part of the ball."

Factors such as altitude and weather play a role in how much the curveball breaks. Temperature has a minor effect, because the air is denser on a cold day than on a warm day, which causes the ball to break more. So, the ball breaks slightly less on hot summer nights in Atlanta.

Altitude has a huge impact on curveballs when the Braves visit Coors Field. Denver's air pressure is roughly 80 percent compared to major league ballparks that lie at or near sea level. That limits the curve's break by about 20 percent. So, a pitch that breaks 12 inches near sea level would curve nine to 10 inches in Denver.

The same factor plays a minor role at Turner Field, which has the third-highest elevation among big league parks.

"In Atlanta, there's a higher temperature typically on the average," said Nathan. "There's also a little bit higher altitude at about 1,000-feet. A 1,000-foot altitude would be about a four percent effect. These things play a role."

ALUMNI NOTES

Braves Hall of Fame broadcaster and former pitcher **Ernie Johnson** (RHP, 1950, '52-58) was inducted into the Georgia Sports Hall of Fame Feb. 20 at the Macon City Auditorium.

Marquis Grissom's (OF, 1995-96) third annual Get in the Game Celebrity Golf Tournament is scheduled July 1 at Durham Lake Golf Course. Individual slots are $150. Visit MGBA.org for information.

Grissom's Field of Dreams Extravaganza for youth players is scheduled April 3 from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. at the Field of Dreams complex at 1355 Sigman Rd. in Conyers, Ga. Grissom also will host a Spring Break Baseball Camp April 5-9 at the facility. Visit MGBA.org for information.

B.J. Surhoff (OF/1B, 2000-02) and the late **George Sisler** (1B, 1928-30) are among the new class of 10 inductees to the College Baseball Hall of Fame. The class will be honored July 1 in Lubbock, Tex., as part of the College Baseball Foundation's annual celebration. Surhoff attended the University of North Carolina, and Sisler attended the University of Michigan.

Hank Aaron (OF/1B, 1954-74) and "Mr. Cub" Ernie Banks are scheduled to do a public signing together at Steiner Sports/Last Licks in Scarsdale, N.Y., on April 17 from 12-1:30 p.m. Tickets must be reserved in advance. Call (914) 273-3551.

Aaron was a keynote speaker at Florence Crittenton's eighth annual Teaming up for Kids Luncheon Mar. 4 at the Arizona Biltmore Resort & Spa in Phoenix, Ariz. The organization has assisted girls in need for 114 years.

Aaron also was a guest at the third Governor's Baseball Dinner hosted by Florida Gov. Charlie Crist at Tropicana Field in St. Petersburg Feb.17. The event honors the major league teams and their minor league affiliates that hold spring training or play year-round in Florida.

Garrett Anderson (OF, 2009) signed a minor league contract with the Dodgers.

Phil Niekro (RHP, 1964-83, '87) will be among Hall of Famers participating in the inaugural Cooperstown Golf Classic during Father's Day weekend (June 18-20). The event is a fundraiser for the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum. To reserve a spot, call (607) 547-0310.

The Mississippi Braves are holding Phil Niekro Night June 14. He will speak at a special luncheon in the Farm Bureau Grill, throw out the first pitch, and sign autographs during the game.

Dale Murphy (OF/C/1B, 1976-90) was scheduled to speak at the 23rd annual Steak & Burger Dinner, the largest annual fund-raising event for the Boys & Girls Clubs of Augusta, Ga., on Mar. 25 at Augusta State University's Christenberry Fieldhouse.

Hank Small (1B, 1978) died Mar. 10 at age 56 after a freak accident. While moving into a new home in Griffin, Ga., he fell backward and his head hit the pavement.

David Justice (OF/1B, 1989-96) and Dusty Baker (OF, 1968-75) were among the celebrity guests at Ante Up For Autism on Mar. 6 at Penske Racing Museum in Phoenix, Ariz.

Joe Torre (C/1B, 1960-68, Manager, 1982-84) and Sandy Koufax told baseball stories to a capacity audience of 7,100 to benefit Torre's Safe at Home Foundation Feb. 27 at the Nokia Theater in Los Angeles.

Randall Simon (1B, 1997-99) signed with the Rockford Riverhawks of the independent Northern League. He hasn't played in the majors since 2004 but has been active in European leagues.

Former Braves president **Stan Kasten**, now president of the Washington Nationals, was inducted into the Junior Achievement Atlanta Business Hall of Fame at a black-tie gala Mar. 13 at the Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead.

BIRTHDAYS

APRIL

1ST	PHIL NIEKRO (71)
	WILLIE MONTANEZ (62)
2ND	BILLY SAMPLE (55)
3RD	ALEX GRAMMAS (84)
	HAWK TAYLOR (71)
	MARTY CLARY (48)
	QUILVIO VERAS (39)
4TH	BRAD KOMMINSK (49)
6TH	HAL SCHACKER (85)
	TOMMY GREENE (43)
	BRET BOONE (41)
8TH	DIORY HERNANDEZ (26)
10TH	FRANK LARY (80)
	BOB WATSON (64)
	LEE LACY (62)
	PETE VARNEY (61)
	KEN GRIFFEY (60)
	MIKE DEVEREAUX (47)
	MARVIN FREEMAN (47)
11TH	SEAN BERGMAN (40)
	MARK TEIXEIRA (30)
12TH	JOHNNY ANTONELLI (80)
	JOSE ALVAREZ (54)
14TH	MARTY KEOUGH (76)
	JAY ALDRICH (49)
	DAVID JUSTICE (44)
	GREG MADDUX (44)
	GREG MYERS (44)
	STEVE AVERY (40)
	KYLE FARNSWORTH (34)
17TH	MARQUIS GRISSOM (43)
18TH	RON SCHUELER (62)
	RICO BROGNA (40)
19TH	SCOTT KAMIENIECKI (46)
20TH	TODD HOLLANDSWORTH (37)
22ND	MIKE BELL (42)
23RD	ANDRUW JONES (33)
24TH	BOB BEALL (62)
	CHIPPER JONES (38)
	WILL CUNNANE (36)
25TH	BOB JOHNSON (67)
	LEW KRAUSSE (67)
	DARREN HOLMES (44)
	BRAD CLONTZ (39)
	BRIAN BARTON (28)
28TH	PABLO TORREALBA (62)
	JORGE SOSA (33)
29TH	ART KENNEY (94)
	TOM HOUSE (63)
30TH	BOB HENDLEY (71)

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"BIG THUNDER"

THE YEAR of Jason Heyward is upon us.

The path to major league stardom is strewn with the bodies of countless "phenoms" that simply couldn't deliver under the bright lights. Knowing there's a risk that Heyward could be back at Triple A by the time this reaches mailboxes, we're going out on a limb... though that limb feels pretty sturdy at the moment.

Regardless of where Heyward - or "Big Thunder," as we prefer for a 6-5, 245-pounder with prodigious power - starts the season, he will make his big league debut in 2010, and he will not return from whence he came. The Braves' lineup will be energized like it hasn't been in years.

Randy Johnson was the "Big Unit." Frank Thomas, the "Big Hurt." David Ortiz is "Big Papi." Walter "Big Train" Johnson won more games than anyone except Cy Young. Paul "Big Poison" Waner played for the Braves in 1941-42, near the end of his Hall of Fame career. Another Hall of Famer, Johnny Mize, was the "Big Cat" before Andres Galarraga was even born. Cecil Fielder and Rick Reuschel were "Big Daddy." And former Braves NL batting champ Rico Carty was the self-proclaimed "Beeg Boy."

There are other examples, but you get the idea. Big ballplayers and big performers need big nicknames. Heyward now has one. He earned it as the top prospect in all of minor league baseball and by hitting legendary home runs and even line drive singles in spring training that left his teammates, manager and opponents dropping their jaws and a Braves executive with a hole in his car.

For the Chinese, it's The Year of the Tiger. But for Braves fans, it's going to be the Year of Big Thunder. And that's only one piece of the roster. The rest of the cast is pretty impressive, too.

To compare Jair Jurrjens and Tommy Hanson to Tom Glavine and John Smoltz would be blasphemy. But remember, Glavine and Smoltz once were 23 years old. Last year, at age 23, Jurrjens was 14-10 with a 2.60 ERA, third-best in the NL. Hanson, who didn't even turn 23 until mid-season, was 11-4/2.89 in four months in the majors.

Glavine, at age 23 in 1989, was 14-8/3.68. And Smoltz, at 23 in 1990, was 14-11/3.85.

"That's a hefty tag to put on kids," said Frank Wren of the comparison. "But they've put themselves in position to at least to be in that discussion."

Okay, Jurrjens and Hanson aren't Glavine and Smoltz, but they're off to a pretty good start. They are the present - and the future - of a pitching staff that is second to none in the league and, six months from now, could be compared to some of the Braves' best of the 1990s.

"I think it has the capabilities to do that," said Wren. "That's a lot to ask of any group. But this group has a lot of ability."

Then there's Brian McCann, who's made four All-Star teams and won three Silver Sluggers in four full seasons in the majors. He's just 26, coming into his prime, and has that vision thing under control.

Catchers don't often win the MVP. The last catcher to win an MVP in the NL was Johnny Bench in 1972. Joe Mauer did it in the American League last year at age 26. If the Braves return to the post-season for the first time since McCann was one of those "Baby Braves" in 2005, don't be surprised if he's a strong candidate to follow Mauer's lead at the same age.

Isn't the optimism generated by Opening Day a wonderful thing to behold!

By now, you've probably noticed a new addition to ChopTalk, and we hope you found Carolyn Lowe's first offering to be as lively and entertaining as we did. We're thrilled that she's agreed to write a column throughout the season.

Don't miss the ad on page 10 for Pete Van Wieren's new book. The Braves Hall of Famer's story is sure to be a nice read between games for his legions of fans.

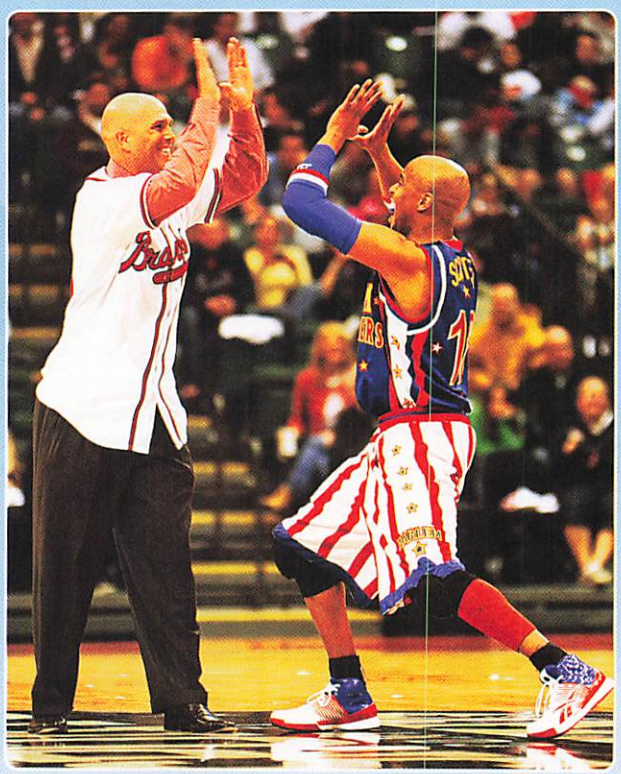
Many of you have already signed up on the ChopTalk Readers page of Facebook. But we hope a lot more of you will do the same now that the season is upon us. It's a great way for us to get to know each other and to stay in touch.

THIS ISSUE OF CHOPTALK was mailed Mar. 19. The May issue will be mailed April 23.

BEYOND BASEBALL

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

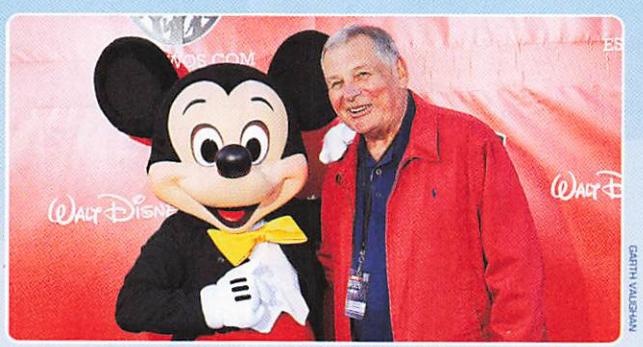
Bobby Cox compares notes with Mickey on lengthly careers, and Tim Hudson demonstrates his "high 10" technique with a member of the Harlem Globetrotters during spring training.



KENT PHILLIPS

M-I-C... K-E-Y... M-O-U-S-E!

ESPN: THE WEEKEND was held at the ESPN Wide World of Sports complex Feb. 25-28 and featured a televised "green carpet" event that included appearances by **John Schuerholz**, **Bobby Cox** and **Tim Hudson**, all of whom proudly posed with Mickey Mouse. Hudson also made a cameo appearance during a performance by the world famous Harlem Globetrotters held at the Milk House, the basketball venue at the Wide World of Sports.



GARTH VAUGHAN

PATTY RASMUSSEN

THE HOTTEST T-SHIRT in the Braves' clubhouse this season is the coveted "Team Diesel" shirt presented to qualifying players by strength and conditioning coach **Phil Falco**. Originally dubbed "Club Diesel," the name was changed to sound less like a dance club. In addition to **David Ross** (L), one of the founders of Team Diesel (Feb. '10 CT), other players wearing the shirt include **Martin Prado**, **Matt Diaz** and **Omar Infante**. Asked about the criteria to earn a t-shirt, Ross responded, "In shape, good body fat number, hard work and consistency! Diesel!!"

Tim Hudson was one of four honorees at his alma mater, Auburn University, when he, **Bo Jackson**, **Frank Thomas** and former Braves reliever **Gregg Olson** (1994) were the first inductees to the "Wall of Fame" at the university's baseball stadium, Plainsman Park. The induction took place on Feb. 27. Because he threw a bullpen session the day before, Hudson received permission from **Bobby Cox** to miss workouts in order to attend the ceremony...

PATTY RASMUSSEN

Tim Hudson (second from right) and fellow inductees (L-R) Gregg Olson, Bo Jackson and Frank Thomas, along with an Auburn official, during a ceremony at the school's baseball field.

Matt Diaz and his wife, **Leslee**, recently formed their own foundation, the MattE and Leslee Diaz Family Foundation. "It's been in the works for a long time," said Diaz, whose nickname, MattE, is a combination of his first name and the first letter of his middle name, Edward. The foundation is in the process of getting its 501c3 non-profit status. "We've done all the paperwork, now we're just waiting to hear back," said Diaz. "The mission is going to be as big as going to Uganda and as small as giving scholarships to students in Polk County, Fla. Our focus is to help orphans and those less fortunate." He said the (**Tim** and **Kim**) **Hudson** Family Foundation served as a template for them. "I didn't want it to be a 'look-at-us' kind of deal," said Diaz. "But when I saw how Tim and Kim Hudson handled the use of their name and all the good will it generated, it showed us it was possible." One of the foundation's first projects was to match the funds for Haiti relief raised by the students at Medulla Elementary School in Lakeland, Fla., where Diaz went to school from kindergarten through fourth grade. As of the second week of March, the students had already raised $2,000...

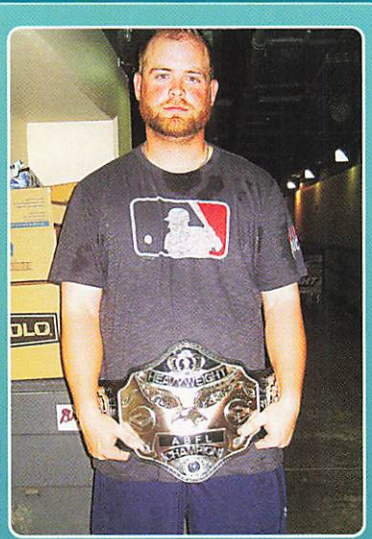
Congratulations to new Braves player **Eric Hinske** and his wife, **Kathryn**, on the birth of their second child, a girl, **Dylan Alivia**, on Feb. 9. The couple has one older daughter, **Ava** (2)...

Tom Glavine was the keynote speaker at the 15th Annual Georgia Tech Baseball Benefit Dinner held Feb. 18 at the Georgia Tech Hotel and Conference Center in Midtown Atlanta...

Former Braves president **Stan Kasten**, now with the Washington Nationals, and his wife, **Helen**, met with current president **John Schuerholz** and his wife, **Karen**, for dinner while the two executives attended a sports business convention at the new Waldorf Astoria Orlando, Mar. 7-9...

Want a first hand look at what life and baseball is like for an American pitcher playing in Japan? Check out former Brave **Buddy Carlyle**'s blog and video diary at buddycarlyle.com. Carlyle decided to document his season with the Nippon Ham Fighters, in part to keep in touch with his family in the U.S., but the blog has become a hit with fans and friends, as well. Carlyle's dry sense of humor infuses his blog posts and his video commentary. He arrived in Japan in mid-February for spring training in Okinawa before moving to Sapporo for the start of the spring season. Carlyle's wife, **Jessica**, son, **Carter**, and daughter, **Kennedy**, were to move to Japan for the season at the end of March. The Carlyles make their off-season home in Peachtree City, Ga...

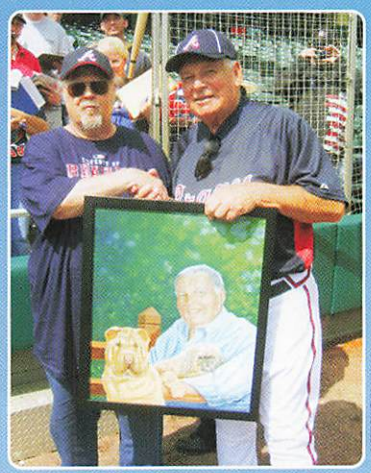
The weeks leading up to spring training games were busy for Aussie reliever **Peter Moylan**, who hosted his daughters, **Montana** and **Matisse**, and their mother, **Tracey**, for two weeks, Feb. 16-Mar. 1. Moylan and his girlfriend, **Mandy Coupel**, kept the visitors from "Down Under" on the go each afternoon and evening with trips to Disney's Magic Kingdom and Epcot, Universal Studios theme park, Sea World, and plenty of shopping...



PATTY RASMUSSEN

THE CHAMP!

BRIAN MCCANN was the winner of the Braves NFL Fantasy Football League, a competition among 11 players, and made sure all his teammates at spring training were aware of it. McCann purchased a championship wrestling belt off eBay for $350, adorned it with the phrase "A.B.F.L." for Atlanta Braves Fantasy League, then stowed the garish silver-and-black belt atop his locker for everyone to see. He planned to come up with a similar display once the team returned to Turner Field.



PATTY RASMUSSEN

MODERN ART

CHOPTALK subscriber **Lew Hartman** got the "Farewell to **Bobby Cox**" tributes off to a great start when he presented an original oil painting of the manager to Cox after a spring training workout Feb 24. "It's fantastic!" crowed Cox, who invited Hartman (above, L) onto the field to talk and pose for pictures. Hartman has painted a number of portraits for Braves players, including **Chipper Jones** and home run legend **Hank Aaron**, and decided to paint Cox late last year after the announcement that this would be Cox's last season of managing. The painting of Cox and his beloved dogs, Rosa and Sassy, is based on the ChopTalk cover photo from November 2006, and is especially meaningful to Cox since Rosa, the Sharpei, has since passed away. Cox's wife, **Pam**, was equally thrilled by the gift and was already planning to hang the painting in a place of honor in their Adairsville, Ga., home.

Former Braves outfielder turned broadcaster **Brian Jordan** played in the Baseball for Kids Legend's Game in Clearwater, Fla., on Mar. 14. The event, sponsored by the Major League Baseball Player's Alumni, benefited the **Cal Ripken Sr.** Foundation.

TALKIN' CHOP

LETTERS & PHOTOS FROM OUR READERS

WHETHER YOU'RE HAVING FUN AT TURNER FIELD, EXPERIENCING A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH YOUR FAVORITE BRAVES PLAYER, OR JUST SHOWING OFF YOUR COLLECTION OF BRAVES STUFF OR TRYING ON YOUR NEW BRAVES SHIRT, WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT AND SEE A PICTURE.

CHIPPER THE SNOWMAN

My name is Brandon Young, and I am 8 years old. My dad (Rick Young) and I are big Braves fans and made our Chipper snowman Saturday, Feb. 13, at our home in Carrollton, Ga.

RICK, PATTI & BRANDON YOUNG
Carrollton, Ga.

FROSTY THE PROGNOSTICATOR

I built and placed this snowman in my yard on Dec. 1. Just a notice to all Phillies and Yankees fans - move over, your reigns are over! The Braves are back, and 2010 is ours! Mr. Frosty's predictions are never wrong. I've been a Braves fan since 1956, and I'm putting in my order for 2010 World Series tickets now!

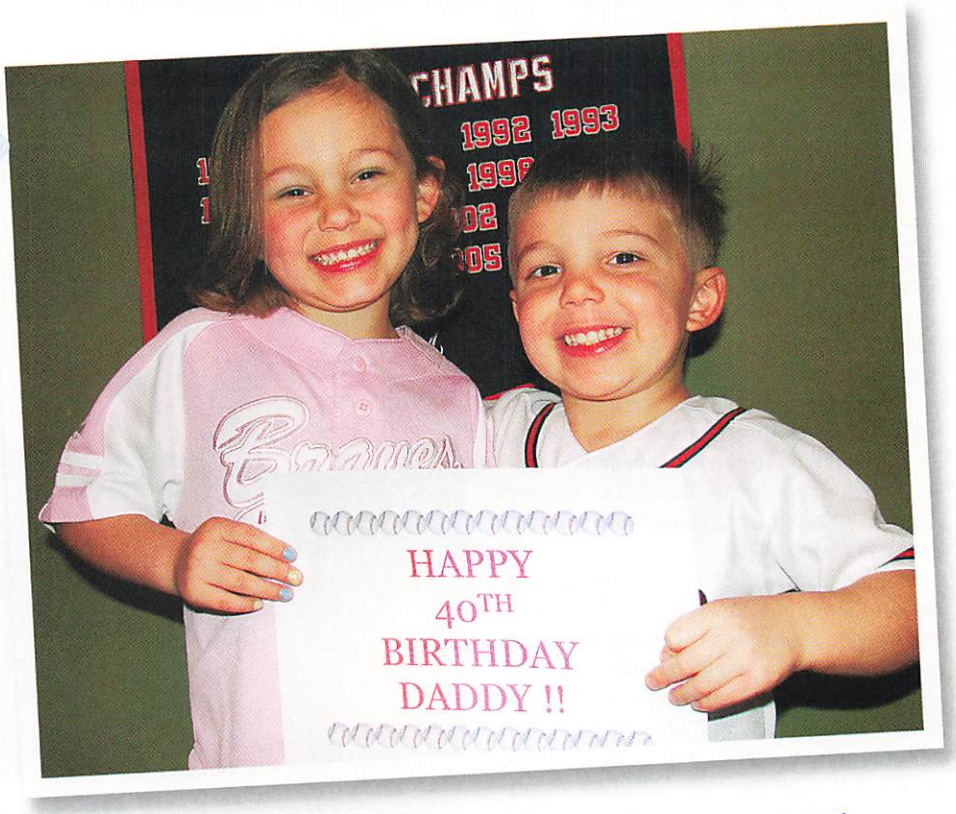
JONATHAN COHEN
Harrisburg, Pa.

CHOPTALK AND THE ATLANTA BRAVES SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

THE BIG 4-0

My husband, Trent Shemwell, is the real deal as a Braves fan. He's originally from Dothan, Alabama, so he grew up watching the Braves every night on TBS. He graduated from Auburn University and quickly moved to Atlanta to be near his favorite team. He's an avid collector of all things baseball, and much of our house is dedicated to displaying his collection. If he's not attending a game, he's watching a game. Thanks to the MLB Network, he can now watch his favorite sport 24/7, 365 days a year, much to the dismay of his wife. This man eats, drinks and sleeps baseball, but besides being passionate about the Braves, he's an amazing husband and father. He's turning 40 this year, and it would be so special if he could see a picture of his children in ChopTalk. He's been a subscriber for many years and enjoys seeing pictures of other dedicated Braves fans like himself. This picture is Kate (6) and Grant (4) dressed in their Braves outfits, wishing him a Happy Birthday.

AMY SHEMWELL
Alpharetta, Ga.



SHARE YOUR BRAVES FEVER!

WRITE TO US

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Letters@ChopTalkonline.com

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WRITE THE BRAVES

Atlanta Braves
P.O. Box 4064
Atlanta, Ga. 30302

For the Braves players, Bobby Cox, the coaches, broadcasters, or members of the front office.

If you request a response, be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Never send anything of value that you want returned. This is no guarantee of a reply.

SPRING SHOWERS

THE FINAL RESTING PLACE OF "MIRACLE MAN"

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

BRAVES HISTORY BUFFS and diehard fans interested in connecting with a rich slice of one of the franchise's three World Series championships might want to make a visit to Riverside Cemetery, located roughly 80 miles south of Turner Field in Macon on Riverside Drive, just off I-75.

There they can pay homage to the first man to lead the Braves to a World Championship, George "Miracle Man" Stallings, manager of the 1914 "Miracle Braves," one of the truly legendary teams in baseball history.

Stallings' grave, located on a hillside facing the Ocmulgee River, is stop No. 59 on the walking tour of the cemetery. Maps are available at the cemetery gatehouse. The Historic Riverside Cemetery Conservancy also included Stallings' life story in their popular annual event, "Spirits of October," an evening walking tour featuring actors performing monologues based on the lives of notable cemetery residents. During the 2008 tour, Stallings was portrayed by a high school senior named Mike Kirscher.

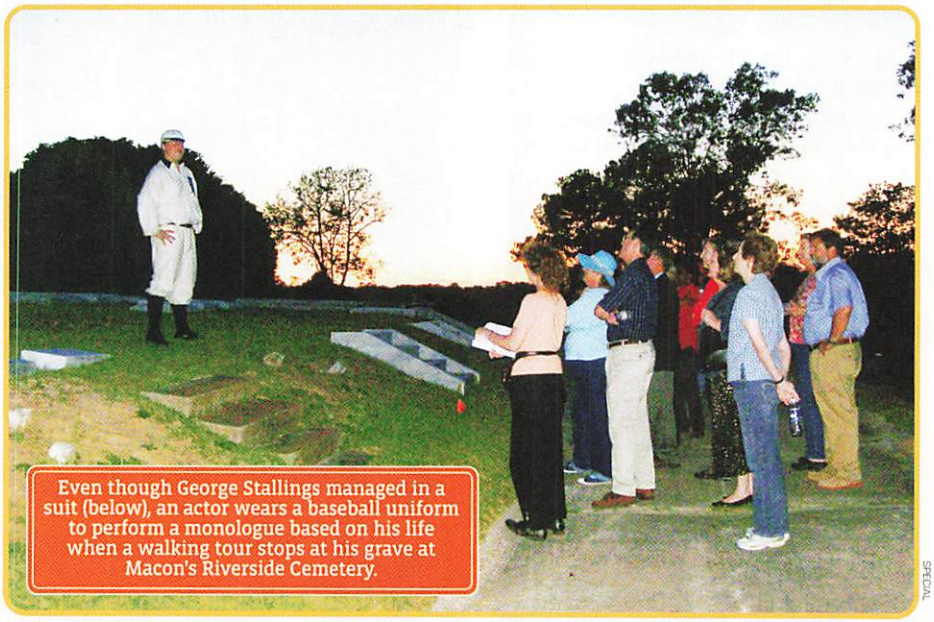
The Boston Braves were in last place on July 18, 1914, 11 ½ games behind the first-place New York Giants when they proceeded to go on a 51-16 (.761) tear in the second half. The won the National League pennant by 10 ½ games, then swept the heavily favored Philadelphia Athletics, managed by the legendary Connie Mack, in the World Series.

Stallings was given much of the credit for his brilliant management of the team that included such notable players as shortstop Rabbit Maranville, second baseman Johnny Evers, and pitchers Lefty Tyler, Dick Rudolph and Bill James.

Stallings was a true Southerner, born in Augusta, Ga., where he also began his managerial career with the town's Southern League franchise. He also was the first baseball coach at Mercer College in Macon.

He managed the Boston Braves from 1913-20, and his influence undoubtedly led to the Braves holding spring training in Athens, Ga., in 1913, Macon in 1914-15, and Columbus in 1919-20.

Lightning struck just once for Stallings. Despite his long career in baseball, he was unable to duplicate his 1914 success, resigned his position with the Braves in 1920, and was out of baseball for good following the 1927 season when he managed in the International League.



Even though George Stallings managed in a suit (below), an actor wears a baseball uniform to perform a monologue based on his life when a walking tour stops at his grave at Macon's Riverside Cemetery.

SPECIAL

SPECIAL

PATTY RASMUSSEN

In eight seasons with the Braves, he was 579-597 (.492). Overall, in 13 years of managing in the majors, he was 879-898 (.495) with the Phillies (1897-98), Tigers (1901) and Highlanders (Yankees, 1909-10).

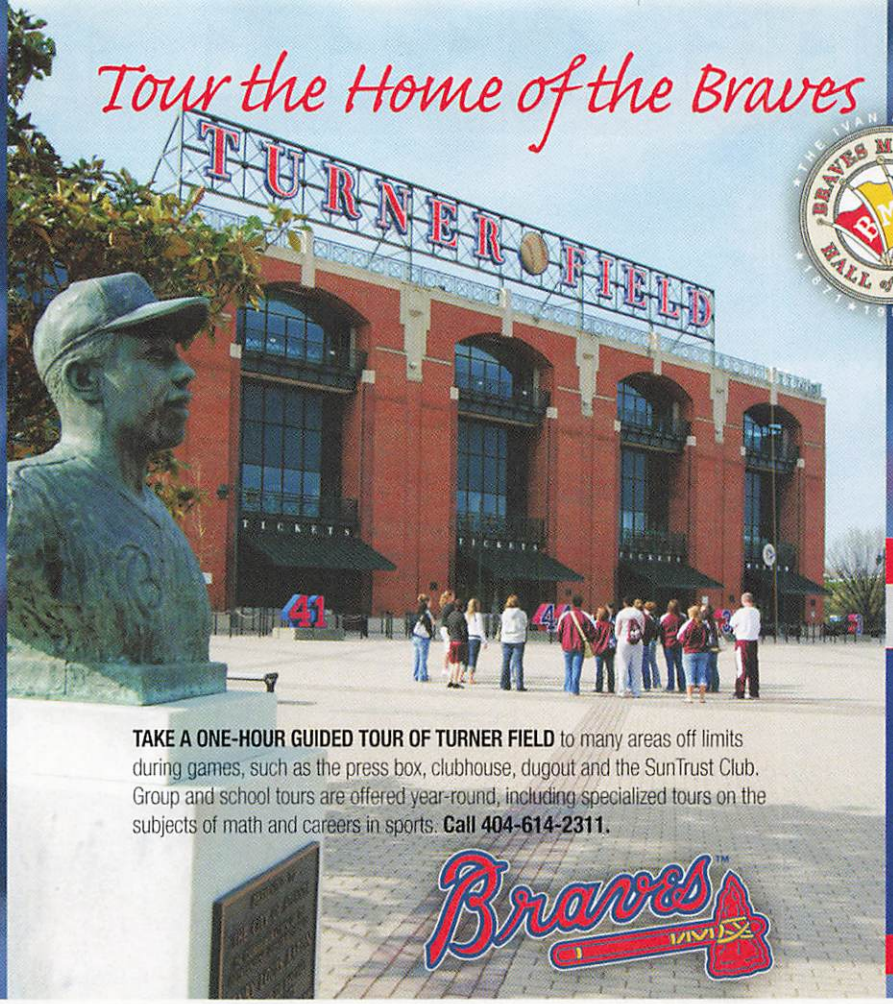
Stallings managed in a suit and was known for being so nervous during games that he'd frequently wear out his pants from sliding up and down the bench. He was one of the first managers to popularize the use of "platooning."

The only other managers to win a World Series in franchise history are Bobby Cox (1995) and Fred Haney, manager of the 1957 Milwaukee Braves. The only other manager, besides Cox, with more wins than Stallings in franchise history was Frank Selee (1,004 from 1890-1901).

An interesting side note on his grave: The birthdate engraved on Stallings' tombstone (Nov. 10, 1869) is incorrect. He was actually born on Nov. 17, 1867 and died of chronic heart disease on May 13, 1929, at age 61. Legend has it that when a doctor asked the ailing Stallings why his heart was so bad, he muttered, "Oh, those bases on balls."

For more information about how to visit the gravesite of George Tweedy Stallings, check the cemetery website, riverside-cemetery.com.

Tour the Home of the Braves



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BOBBY COX $6 DAYS

In honor of Bobby Cox's last season as Braves manager, tours of Turner Field will be $6 on the following days in 2010.

2010		
	April 10	Bobby earned his first managerial win in 1978
	May 21	Bobby's birthday
	June 16	Bobby became the winningest manager in Braves history with 1,005 wins in 1998
	July 11	Bobby managed the 2000 All-Star Game at Turner Field
	August 28	Bobby earned his 1,500th career win in 1999
	September 29	Bobby earned his 2,000th career win in 2004

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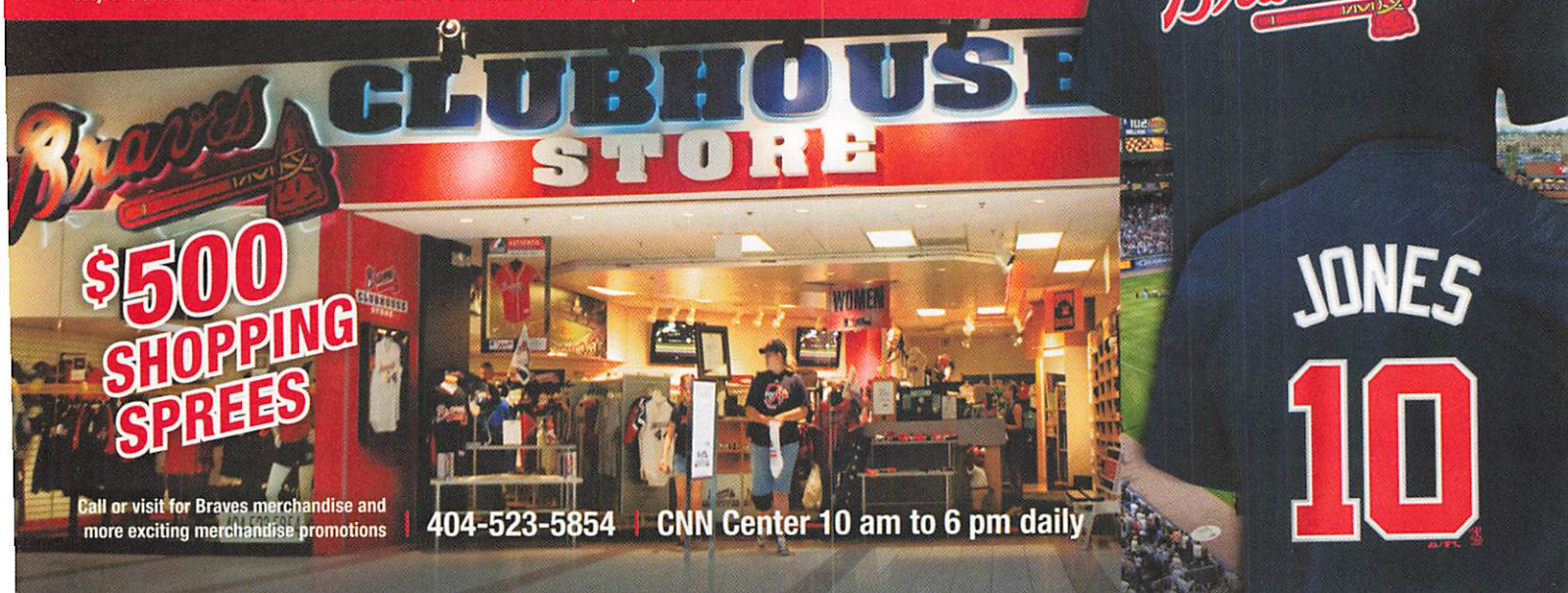

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